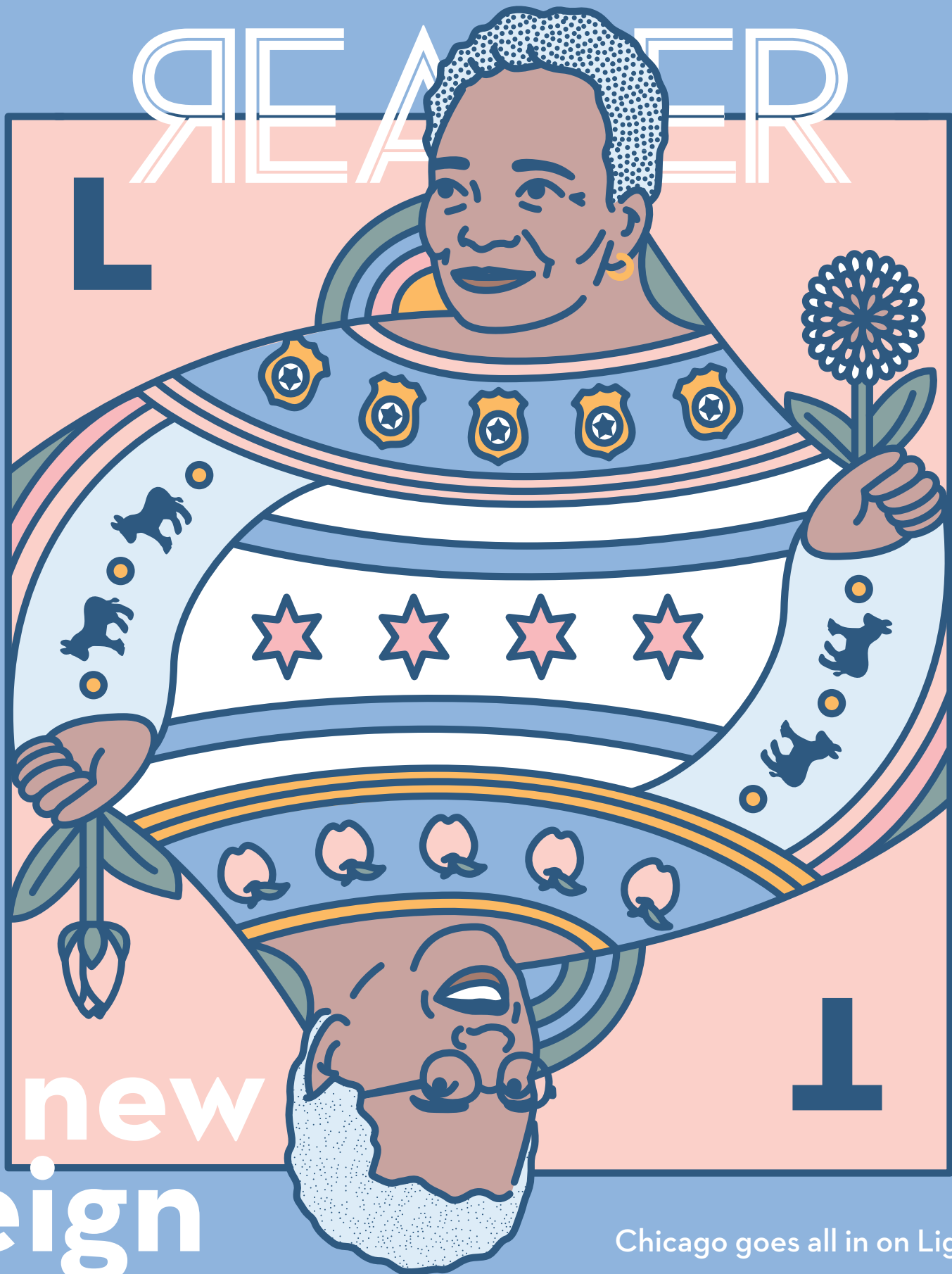




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A new reign

Chicago goes all in on Lightfoot

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A new battleground

Veterans of the armed forces' segregated past fight to keep their legacy alive.

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CORRECTION: Last week, our story "More money no problems" incorrectly stated that Ameya Pawar was endorsed by United Working Families. The group did not endorse any candidates for treasurer.



ISA GIALLORENZO

CITY LIFE

STREET VIEW

Kickin' it

A rapper's style starts with his shoes

"I CALL MY style 'SlightFlex,' which means doing the most and nothing at all simultaneously," says Corey Henderson, 29, a rapper whose stage name is Almighty Xanno. The Austin resident was photographed at the Jefferson Park CTA station on the way to visiting his brother in Des Plaines. Henderson breaks down the concept he created, explaining that "Slight" is for the subtleness of his outfit, and "Flex" is the color coordination that makes a look really pop. He says his style is built from the shoes upward: here his prized 90s Nike Air Maxes are paired with pieces that echo the sneakers' red, black, and white hues. "Everything I wear is focused around the color of the shoes," he says. "I like dressing for success." —ISA GIALLORENZO

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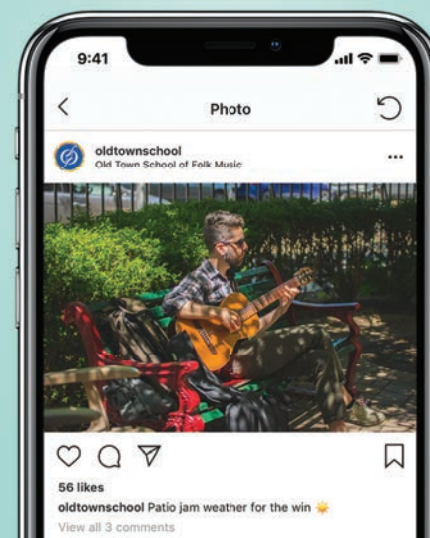
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TRANSPORTATION

Breakin' the law

What should Chicago do about cyclists who don't play by the rules?

By JOHN GREENFIELD

Ever since my last *Reader* column on Chicago's mayoral election was published, I've been fielding a lot of complaints about lawbreaking bicyclists. I mentioned Toni Preckwinkle's statement from a recent debate that many bike riders "don't pay any attention to the traffic laws, which is not only infuriating, but also scary for drivers."

A typical comment I received on Twitter read, "Many, many cyclists ARE unsafe. Very self-centered, all-about-me-me-me and generally disrespectful." Isn't it great that drivers never act that way?

In fairness, though, hazardous and obnoxious cycling is a thing. So I'd like to throw a bone to the "there are a lot of reckless bikers" crowd with a look at what Chicago should do about bicyclists who break traffic rules.

Let's classify lawbreaking by bike riders into three categories:

1. Technically illegal, but widespread and largely harmless, behavior. This includes slow, cautious cycling for short distances on sidewalks or against traffic on side streets. Another example is riders treating stoplights like stop signs and stop signs like yield signs. This is known as the "Idaho stop" because it's legal in the Gem State.

2. Lawbreaking that may be annoying, but is mostly a danger to the cyclist. This includes riding for long distances on sidewalks or against traffic on main streets, and riding at night without lights. (People who do the latter are nicknamed "bike ninjas.")

3. Willfully inconsiderate or reckless riding that can terrify or endanger others. This includes hauling ass down crowded sidewalks; failing to yield to pedestrians in crosswalks; and mindlessly bombing red lights and stop signs.

There's a racial equity component to the question of how we should deal with these behaviors. A 2017 *Tribune* investigation found that some communities of color saw exponentially more tickets for bike infractions than

majority-white neighborhoods. A police rep eventually acknowledged that this was due to officers using bike enforcement as a pretext for searches in high-crime areas.

To get some different viewpoints on the best policies to address unlawful cycling, I checked in with a few city agencies and transportation experts and advocates.

I contacted the Wisconsin-based National Motorists Association for the right-wing windshield perspective. After all, the group's hard-line stances against automated enforcement, lower speed limits, traffic calming, stricter DUI rules, and even seatbelt laws make the American Automobile Association look like Greenpeace. But I was pleasantly surprised by spokeswoman Shelia Dunn's fairly balanced response, which stressed that everyone "driving, riding, or walking . . . should be responsible for their own safety and look out for others on the road."

Predictably, the NMA doesn't support legalizing the Idaho stop. Dunn argued that doing so would make it difficult for pedestrians and drivers to predict bicyclists' behavior, and embolden cyclists to run reds and signs even when intersections aren't clear.

Dunn called for better and earlier mobility education for kids, including safe walking, biking, and driving practices. "I lived in Germany for a time, and my fourth-grader was required to take a bicycling course in school," she said. "This would be a tremendous help."

I asked the Chicago Police Department about their cycling enforcement policies. (We didn't discuss the racial discrepancies, which I've written about at length.) Spokesman Howard Ludwig said officers are told to use discretion when writing bike tickets, differentiating between behavior that's merely unlawful, and that which is truly hazardous. For example, he said, a bike ninja on a dark side street might get a ticket, but "a cyclist without a light in a well-lit commercial area might pedal away with a warning."

This latitude helps explain why officers



RACHAL DUGGAN

often choose to ignore cyclists doing Idaho stops. But Ludwig said the CPD will sometimes conduct "targeted enforcement" stings on bike riders, staking out particular locations where residents or aldermen have complained about bike infractions, or in response to a cyclist-involved crash.

While the CPD's job is wielding the proverbial "stick" of enforcement against hazardous behavior, the Chicago Department of Transportation provides "carrots" in the form of bike infrastructure, education, and encouragement. CDOT has built dozens of miles of physically protected bike lanes over the last eight years, which help make less-confident cyclists feel more comfortable staying off the sidewalk.

The department has also pioneered the use of contraflow bike lanes that legalize "wrong way" riding on otherwise one-way stretches of designated side-street bikeways called "neighborhood greenways." This has made already-popular low-stress routes like Glenwood, Berteau, and Wood even more useful.

Meanwhile, CDOT's Bicycling and Safe Routes Ambassadors safety outreach teams pedal to schools, day camps, senior centers, and community events to spread the gospel. The ambassadors attended 515 events and directly educated more than 75,000 people in 2018, according to department spokesman Mike Claffey.

DePaul University transportation expert Joe Schwieterman coauthored a 2016 study on the Idaho stop that found that a full two-thirds of Chicago cyclists proceeded through stoplights if there was no cross traffic, and only one out of 25 riders came to a complete stop at stop signs. The researchers endorsed legalizing the Idaho stop here, although they feel more study is needed.

Schwieterman also recommended letting bicyclists take an online bike safety class in lieu of paying a fine. "It would send a clear message about safety while lessening tension with law enforcement personnel."

Active Transportation Alliance advocacy director Jim Merrell argued that sidewalk cycling is best addressed with more protected lanes, neighborhood greenways, and off-street trails. Free bike light giveaways, which have been done in the past by the Bike Ambassadors, and Streetsblog Chicago cofounder Steven Vance's grassroots "Get Lit!" campaign, can help eradicate bike ninjas.

Merrell doesn't have a problem with police throwing the book at riders who endanger other people, especially pedestrians. "But it's unclear that this behavior, while annoying and disrespectful, presents a [significant] public safety risk," he said. "Crash data tells us that reckless behavior among drivers—especially speeding, distracted and drunk driving, and failure to stop for people walking—is by far the greatest cause of serious injuries and fatalities, so that's what traffic enforcement should target."

Merrell added that as biking becomes more mainstream, cultural norms will shift and help reinforce good behavior.

Indeed, when I visited Amsterdam, Copenhagen, and Berlin, places with universal bike education and seamless car-free cycling routes, I was struck by how orderly and law-abiding the bike culture was. My impression was that, in these cities where biking is totally safe and traffic rules are logical, if you don't comply you run the risk of being perceived as a person with poor home training—or worse, an American. ☐

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NEWS & POLITICS



DANIEL X. O'NEIL

POLITICS

Translating Rahm

When he blasts Kim Foxx for Smollettgate you have to wonder what he's really up to.

By **BEN JORAVSKY**

One day last week I got a call from a friend at an out-of-town airport, who breathlessly announced that Mayor Rahm's big old mug was on every TV screen in the terminal, raging with righteous indignation to Wolf Blitzer over the latest travesty of justice in Chicago...

Influential people making blatantly false statements.

I'm like—OMG, Rahm finally had his Ralph Metcalfe moment of realization, where he awoke to discover that the mayor of Chicago was giving \$1.3 billion in property taxes to a well-connected developer to build upscale housing in an already gentrifying ward. All in the name of eradicating blight in poor neighborhoods and building the tax base.

Oh, wait, Rahm's the mayor making those blatantly fraudulent claims in regards to the infamous Lincoln Yards Deal. Never mind.

By the way, youngsters—Ralph Metcalfe was the south side congressman who decided to break from the Machine and Mayor Richard J. Daley over the issue of police brutality. Now back to Rahm.

For the last few days, the mayor's been venting his spleen with righteous rage at Cook County State's Attorney Kim Foxx for hastily, and without compelling reason, dropping charges against Jussie Smollett for allegedly making up claims of a hate crime.

Mayor Rahm's not alone. I haven't seen so many people so righteously venting their spleen since O.J. walked.

NEWS & POLITICS

I have two thoughts about Smollettgate. On the one hand—yes, it reeks. If the allegations are true, Smollett wasted our time and money and police resources with his phony claims of getting mugged in the middle of the night by two MAGA lovers.

And, yes, it's bad that the powerful and well-connected—like Tina Tchen, Michelle Obama's former chief of staff—feel it's okay to get on the horn and call other well-connected people, like Kim Foxx, on behalf of the rich and famous. (Tchen called to connect Foxx with a Smollett relative who wanted the case moved from the local police to the FBI.)

The worst part is that the fallout undercuts Foxx's efforts to institute alternative punishments to prison time for nonviolent crimes, like the one Smollett allegedly committed. So, some poor schmuck, who has no connection to a well-connected political player, ultimately pays the price. Welcome to Chicago.

On the other hand, it gives me another chance to play one of my favorite political parlor games: What's Rahm really up to?

This game stems from Rahm's habit of saying one thing, when it's clear he's actually angling for something else. And then we try to figure out what he's really up to.

I know what you're probably thinking—oh, Ben, you're just a typical cynical Chicago reporter.

Yeah, well, let me remind you that the most famous saying of the mayor you elected (twice) is “never let a serious crisis go to waste.”

Which is pretty cynical in and of itself.

Ultimately, I wouldn't care about Rahm's conniving if he was just, you know, some ordinary Joe in my Monday night bowling league. But as the mayor of Chicago, there are consequences for the games he plays.

Like when he resisted releasing the video of Jason Van Dyke shooting Laquan McDonald because he said he wanted Cook County State's Attorney Anita Alvarez to finish her investigation. As opposed to trying to bury that story until everyone forgot it ever existed so we never, ever got around to dealing with the issue of police brutality.

(My guess is Alvarez would probably still be investigating the Van Dyke shooting had Cook County Judge Franklin Valderrama not ordered the video released.)

Or when Rahm closed 50 schools in black and Hispanic communities because he said he wanted to improve education for poor kids. As opposed to clearing out those communities in the hopes that a wealthier, more gentrified

constituency would move in. C'mon folks, admit it—Chris Kennedy was right when he said Rahm's planning policies were intended to move poor people out of town.

Or when he tearfully announced last September that he wasn't running for reelection because he wanted to move on to the next chapter of his life. As opposed to internal polls that probably showed him losing by double digits. So community activists would never think they had an impact on what goes down in this town.

In the matter of his outrage over Smollett, we need a little context. Foxx was elected in 2016 thanks to a community uprising that occurred when Judge Valderrama ordered Rahm to release that tape.

Activists took to the streets demanding that Rahm, police chief Garry McCarthy, and Alvarez pay a political price. And they have. Rahm fired McCarthy—throwing him under the bus to save his own skin (speaking of another great episode of what's Rahm really up to). And eventually Rahm himself decided not to run for reelection to, as I said, forgo the embarrassment of losing.

So, he's clearly enjoying using this “crisis” to make Foxx squirm. And he relishes any opportunity to get on national TV. And he likes distancing himself from the mess—like he's got nothing to do with it, even though Tchen's a family friend. (Funny, in his rage over Smollettgate Rahm manages to avoid blasting Tchen.) And he's trying to make himself look like, of all things, a criminal justice reformer.

Which is almost as ridiculous as his efforts to portray himself as the savior of public education in Chicago, which survived despite his early efforts to farm it out to private charters.

I'd say Rahm's the biggest phony in Smollettgate. But that role goes to President Trump, who's calling for a federal investigation into Foxx's handling of the matter.

I don't think Trump should call for a federal investigation into anything until he releases the results of the federal investigation into himself—aka, the Mueller Report, which Attorney General William Barr says he'll release one of these days. Probably after he redacts all the incriminating parts.

My old friend Ken Davis predicts a day will come when I will miss Mayor Rahm's reign.

Kenny D may have a point. I can't imagine a Mayor Lightfoot or Preckwinkle being so deviously entertaining. 

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ON CULTURE

'We can't buy food with a tuition waiver'

UIC grad students strike for better pay.

By DEANNA ISAACS

Late last year, University of Illinois at Chicago Chancellor Michael Amiridis presented an ambitious update to the 50-year master plan for the UIC campus.

For its current phase, over the next ten years, the plan calls for multiple new buildings and an emphasis on turning the fortress-like environment of architect Walter Netsch's once-celebrated 1960s "Brutalist" design into a friendlier space. As a first step, Amiridis said in a television interview, UIC will be getting rid of walls along Harrison and Halsted streets that isolate the campus from the city.

The price tag? A cool billion dollars for starters, some of it to be raised through private-public partnerships and the sale of bonds guaranteed, in part, by revenue from student fees.

On March 19, after a year of unsuccessful contract negotiations, UIC's 1,500 graduate student workers went on strike. They're seeking a salary increase and fee relief.

The graduate employees are currently paid about \$18,000 a year and given free tuition for two semesters of 20-hour work weeks. UIC Graduate Employees Organization co-president Jeff Schuhrke says teaching assistants are often the primary instructors in undergraduate classes of up to 60 students. At UIC and elsewhere, this arrangement is justified as an apprenticeship, but it's long been exploited to the university's advantage.

GEO is asking for a significant raise: 22.6 percent over three years. Schuhrke, who notes that "we can't pay rent or buy food with a tuition waiver," said in an interview last week that this would just bring UIC closer to the salaries paid by other major urban research universities. That's an observation backed up by letters of support from faculty, noting the increasing difficulty of recruiting talented graduate students.

UIC says it has offered a raise of 11.95 percent over three years.

In a letter to the campus community, posted on the first day of the strike, the administration offered this rationale: "When you annualize [the current salary], from 9 months to 12 months and equate it to full time at 40 hours per week, plus the value of the tuition waivers, it is akin to a salary of \$62,375 per year."

GEO is also concerned about rising fees that it says now amount to as much as \$2,000 annually. These include a fee that singles out international students, whose visas, Schuhrke notes, don't allow them to seek outside work. (How important are international students to the finances of the University of Illinois system? It was revealed last fall that the Uni-



UIC grad students on the picket line © UIC GEO

versity of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is now paying \$424,000 annually for a \$60 million insurance policy that protects it against a drop in enrollment of business and engineering students from China.)

Then there's the hefty "General Fee," applied to all students; it's increasing \$50 per semester, to \$962 for the next two-semester academic year. According to the university website, the General Fee supports the fixed costs "of operating fee-supported facilities on campus," including housing.

In a statement posted on the university's website on Monday, Michael Ginsburg, the associate vice chancellor for human resources said, "The University cannot waive these fees because there is no source of funds which could be used to make up for the loss of revenue."

According to the administration, UIC intends to "continue normal operations during the strike."

UIC faculty union president Janet Smith says that while campus improvements are needed, there's a question of priorities. "It's a bigger problem than just UIC," Smith says. "We're part of the University of Illinois system, and what we see is that the system is very keen about real estate development, and not so much about putting money into salaries or helping support students."

"The whole UI system announced that they weren't going to raise tuition again, for the fifth year in a row," Smith continues. "That sounds great. But what happens is they raise fees. The day they announced they weren't going to raise tuition, our chancellor announced that they were going to raise fees by 3.6 percent. On top of that, most students pay, in addition to tuition and fees, a differential. In my department [Smith teaches in the department of urban planning], students pay another \$2,500 per semester, just to go to school." (Graduate school differentials range next year from \$383 to \$5,147 per semester.)

"If they don't raise the pay for student workers, if they don't raise the pay for faculty, they're going to have some nice buildings, but they're not going to have the same people teaching in them," Smith says. "Faculty are thinking they might leave, and graduate students are not coming to UIC because they don't get offered a salary that's competitive with other research I universities."

"We're fighting against the idea that grad school is some kind of hazing ritual as opposed to real life," said Schuhrke in a statement released by GEO. "We're professionals, often with years of experience and master's degrees. We provide essential labor for UIC."

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FOOD & DRINK



Tamar Fasja Unikel pours ganache over her flourless chocolate cake.

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FOOD FEATURE

Cake jefes

Armed with family recipes, Masa Madre takes on Passover.

By AIMEE LEVITT

Last week Elena Vázquez Felgueres and Tamar Fasja Unikel, the owners and proprietors and also chief bakers and delivery drivers of Masa Madre, which is, as far as they know, Chicago's only Jewish-Mexican bakery, met in Vázquez Felgueres's kitchen in Pilsen to try out recipes for Passover, three weeks away.

This is unusually early for them; most of the time, their business keeps them so busy they

don't start thinking about holiday specials until the holidays are nearly upon them. Passover, however, presents a special challenge: in commemoration of the Israelites' precipitous exodus from Egypt, which didn't leave them enough time for their bread to rise, Jews abstain from leavened baked goods for the length of the entire eight-day festival. Over time, the prohibition has expanded to include grains, including wheat—meaning no flour. Passover baked goods are notorious both for their density and lack of flavor.

This Passover, Masa Madre will be selling flourless chocolate cake. Vázquez Felgueres and Fasja Unikel have both come to the kitchen armed with family recipes. Fasja Unikel's comes from her aunt, who owns a bakery in Mexico City, where both women grew up; Vázquez Felgueres's comes from her grandmother, who texted her a photograph of the recipe, handwritten in a mixture of French and Spanish. ➔

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“It’s complicated to do family recipes,” says Fasja Unikel as she reaches into the oven to test her cakes for doneness. “They’re not used to doing exact measurements. When they say cups, they mean water cups, not measuring cups.”

“Some say, ‘add *puño*,’ a pinch, a handful of flour,” adds Vázquez Felgueres. “But it depends on the [size of the] hand. I don’t know why they’re like that. They probably had kids and a full house and no time.”

Vázquez Felgueres and Fasja Unikel first met in fashion school in Mexico City a decade ago and reunited in Chicago early in 2017 after Vázquez Felgueres moved here. (Fasja Unikel arrived in 2011.) They established Masa Madre that December. Business has been growing steadily since then, mostly through word of mouth and Instagram. The bakery’s calling card is its babka. Fasja Unikel learned the recipe in Israel three years ago from the baker Lior Mashiach.

“It’s the perfect balance of bread,” says Vázquez Felgueres. “Not too sweet, not too light, chewy.”

They began tweaking the recipe with Mexican flavors to make it their own: dulce de leche, cinnamon churro, and a sweet chile jam. They expanded to other holiday treats: pan de muerte for the Day of the Dead; rugelach and *sufganiyot*, or filled doughnuts, for Hanukkah; *hamentaschen*, triangular jam-filled cookies, for Purim; challah for Shabbat. (Though their kitchen isn’t kosher-certified, they use kosher ingredients and have dairy-free variations of most of their recipes.) For Passover, they plan to infuse their chocolate cake with *café de olla*, a blend of coffee, cinnamon, chocolate, and *piloncillo*, a raw dark sugar.

As soon as Fasja Unikel’s cakes come out of the oven, Vázquez Felgueres begins mix-

ing her batter. The recipe calls for only five ingredients: butter, eggs, chocolate, sugar, and almond meal. “It’s very simple,” she says. “Apparently.”

“Hopefully,” Fasja Unikel adds.

The batter comes out light and creamy. “It tastes like chocolate mousse,” says Vázquez Felgueres. Fasja Unikel pokes a finger into the bowl and licks it, and then smiles. “It’s good.”

Fasja Unikel grew up eating a combination of traditional Jewish and Mexican flavors. Her mother’s family is from eastern Europe and her father is from Syria. Her paternal grandmother would add avocado and salsa to her kibbeh, while her mother’s family would serve gefilte fish with tomatoes, chiles, and onions. Vázquez Felgueres, who isn’t Jewish, grew up

in a Jewish neighborhood and was familiar with the cuisine also, although until Masa Madre, she wasn’t sure which pastries went with which holiday. “Tamar is a great teacher,” she says.

Vázquez Felgueres pours her batter into miniature loaf pans and pops them into the oven while Fasja Unikel stirs together melted chocolate, butter, and piloncillo to make the ganache topping for the cakes. Vázquez Felgueres adds a dash of cinnamon, and Fasja Unikel makes a note of the quantity. “We’re always asking questions,” she says. “Going to restaurants and coffee shops, trying babka.” Both women dream of spending time in Mexico City with their grandmothers’ recipe notebooks so they can standardize and reproduce the recipes.

Bakers Elena Vázquez Felgueres and Tamar Fasja Unikel of Masa Madre testing chocolate cake recipes for Passover.

ANJALI PINTO



Masa Madre’s business model is custom-order only. Vázquez Felgueres worked in larger bakeries when she came to Chicago and was appalled by how much was thrown out at the end of the day; now they only bake as much as they need. They make all the deliveries themselves, which makes them feel more connected to their customers.

While the cakes bake, they chat about Fasja Unikel’s baby, due in June, and a recent catastrophe involving a can of exploded condensed milk that was on its way to becoming dulce de leche, something that has never happened to either of them before. (“I think it’s because we left your husband in charge,” muses Vázquez Felgueres. “It was like a bomb went off.” They’re still trying to figure out how to get the remains off the ceiling.) Finally the moment of truth arrives: the cakes are on the counter.

Vázquez Felgueres’s are light, almost like a soufflé, and sunken in the middle. Fasja Unikel’s are denser, with a nutty flavor from the ground walnuts in the batter. The two bakers taste both with and without the ganache and consider. “I think I’ll have to modify the recipe,” says Vázquez Felgueres, peering at the crack on top of her cake. “But not bad for a first trial.”

As usual, they’ll cede the final decision to Fasja Unikel’s husband and Vázquez Felgueres’s wife, both of whom have very similar tastes. But for now, it’s time to clean up the kitchen and get ready for the next round of deliveries.

“We’ll have to be eating chocolate cake for another week,” says Fasja Unikel, trying to look mournful.

Vázquez Felgueres shrugs. “It’s a tough job.”

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James A. Reynolds Jr.

Born: 1927, Memphis, TN
Inducted: 1943-1945, USMC; 1950-1951, Army, Korean War
Staff Sergeant, Quartermaster

Reynolds Jr. was drafted twice into segregated units. During WWII he was sent along with black Marine recruits to train at Montford Point, a segregated section of Camp Lejeune, North Carolina—the largest Marine base in the eastern United States—with less than hospitable conditions. In 2012 Reynolds received a Congressional Gold Medal of Honor along with all the other original Montford Point Marines in recognition for their role in pulling down racial barriers in the armed forces.

Sharon Stokes-Parry

Born: 1966, Chicago
Enlisted: 5/1985 - 5/1995, Sgt. E-5, USMC

Stokes-Parry said she “wanted to work to preserve legacy and help veterans through service.” MPMA encourages people to get in touch if they would like to donate money or time and skills, and the organization would like for more veterans in the community to join as active members to help keep the memory of the original Montford Point Marines alive.

Harry G. Reid

Born: 1942, Chicago
Enlisted: 9/1/1966 - 8/31/2002, 33rd ASG, IL National Guard,
Command Sgt. Major

Reid has fought for civil rights throughout his life: He participated in the Freedom Riders bus campaign, marched with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and was in the unique position of serving as a National Guard military police officer during the 1968 Chicago Riots. In 1999, Reid received the Roy Wilkins Renown Service Award from the NAACP.

A new battleground

Veterans of the armed forces' segregated past fight to keep their legacy alive.

Story and Photos by **MARIAH KARSON**

The Montford Point Marine Association Chapter Two, on the 7000 block of South Vincennes, is a veterans' organization whose founding members were part of the first segregated unit of Marines during WWII. These Leathernecks were similar in importance to the Tuskegee Airmen but remain much less known. Though MPMA has opened membership to honorably discharged veterans of all races, the local chapter currently has only 35 members, down from a high of more than 150 decades ago. The current MPMA veteran's center was purchased in 1984 after a fire destroyed its location on 75th Street in 1983. Today it is run by a handful of volunteer members, led by president Sharon Stokes-Parry.

MPMA's mission is to provide assistance to veterans and continued service to the community. But the organization is fighting to survive, with a tax debt of more than \$73,000 on the building, which is in desperate need of a new roof and a new HVAC system, among other repairs. Its story is similar to American Legion posts, Elks lodges, and other private clubs and fraternal organizations I've visited across the country: an American community rich with history, neglected for years and fading from public memory. (In 2017 I published a book, *American Legion*, about four small ➔

Ron Martin

Born: 1939, Chicago

Enlisted: 8/1959 - 8/1963, Lance Corporal, USMC, Bay of Pigs, USS Wasp (CVS-18)

Martin wanted to enroll at Roosevelt University but after being rejected because the school had already reached their quota of black students he joined the Marine Corps. After his service Martin was the first black regional union director and an organizer for AFL-CIO.



Willis Whitley

Born: 1959, Chicago

Enlisted: 8/28/1980 - 9/30/2013, E-6, U.S. Army, Operation Iraqi Freedom

Whitley joined MPMA, where he is sergeant-at-arms and housing manager, to be around other veterans. He knew Bingham and Reid from his years of service in the National Guard. "We do not have enough help," he said. "We need to stay together, we are a family." Although the hall rentals ended in 2014, Mr. Whitley has continued to volunteer his time keeping the hall open and said, "I'm going down with the ship, but I would like for it not to go down."



George Norman Gray

Born: 1948, Chicago

Inducted: 3/20/1968 - 1/19/1970, SP4, U.S. Army, two Tet Offensives, Vietnam

Gray joined MPMA in 1988 because his professional expertise as an accountant and bookkeeper was needed. He suffers from cancer and PTSD. "I'm now 100 percent service connected, catching all kinds of physical, financial, social, mental hell," he said. "I'm under siege! Sick of all this, I'm trying to get some help."



Henry Cheatham

Born: 1943, Benton, MS

Enlisted: 10/7/1963 - 10/4/1965, E-4, U.S. Army, 7th Army, Germany

Cheatham came from a military family and enlisted at the beginning of Vietnam. He applied for the USMC but was denied because he had been arrested for marching without a parade permit in Jackson, Mississippi. "I think we will make it," he said.

Arthur “Ham” Bingham

Born: 1932, Port Gibson, MS

Inducted: 4/15/1952 - 4/14/1955, Korean War, Sgt. U.S. Army

Bingham, MPMA's house manager, operated the first black-owned TV repair service in Chicago. He knew several members of the post from when he owned a neighborhood liquor store, a grocery store, and then an ice cream parlor after his service. Bingham was also a CPD officer for eight years.



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posts.) MPMA raised more than \$30,000 with a GoFundMe campaign, and in late January former mayoral candidate Susana Mendoza “purged” herself of \$141,550 in campaign contributions that were associated with 25th Ward alderman Danny Solis by making a public donation to MPMA. An exploratory committee is currently weighing possible options: repair the building and rent out space again; merge with another veterans’ organization; sell the building and meet regularly at another location. All these options include paying the tax debt in full.

On my first visit to the hall I attended a meeting with Ray Doeksen, a service officer from the American Legion’s Tattler Post

973 on the north side, who was interested in seeing if there was anything he or the Tattler could do to help out. The meeting began and closed with a prayer, with members bowing their heads and holding hands in a room with a leaky drop ceiling, 1980s mirrored wall, and single space heater. After the meeting we hung out at the bar; it was a Sunday and the crowd had come out for one of the final football games of the season. In subsequent visits to the post I brought sound recording specialist David Obermeyer to assist me in documenting members; he has returned many times since and photographed members on Friday nights. [M](#)

[Twitter](#) @MariahKarson

Paul K. Knox Jr.

Born: 1946, Chicago

Enlisted: 9/13/1964 - 9/13/1968, E-5, USMC, Vietnam

Knox Jr. never used to speak about his service in Vietnam. “I kept it in,” he said. He was diagnosed with PTSD in 2015. He finds camaraderie at MPMA, where he is vice president. “You have to have lived it to realize it.”



ARTS & CULTURE

Access the Bodewadmimwen/English dictionary and online language classes for both adults and children at potawatomidictionary.com and potawatomih heritage.com/#language



Justin Neely teaches Bodewadmimwen at Wanette High School in Wanette, Oklahoma; Neely dances during the Grand Entry of the 2014 Citizen Potawatomi Nation Family Reunion Festival. © CLINTON SINCLAIR; BO APITZ

LIT

Gneshnabem ne?

Citizen Potawatomi Nation produces its first dictionary.

By AMY BIZZARRI

Gneshnabem ne? Do you speak Bodewadmimwen?

Once widely spoken in the Great Lakes region, Bodewadmimwen, the language of the Potawatomi Nation, is slowly inching away from the brink of extinction thanks to new learning initiatives—including an interactive dictionary, the first of its kind.

Chances are you already know a few words of this 1,000-plus-year-old language.

Pecan means nut. *Kibmosabe*—a common expression used by the character Tonto from *The Lone Ranger*, identified in some stories as a member of the Potawatomi Nation—translates to “Take a quick look!” Chicago is “place of wild garlic” for the abundant, yet fragrant *Allium tricoccum* that grew along Lake Michigan and on the banks of the Chicago River.

Last month the Citizen Potawatomi Nation’s language department released a pair of tools to help preserve its highly-endangered language: an online searchable dictionary and a series of free online, self-paced Bodewadmimwen language courses for both adults and children.

The Potawatomi—who call themselves Bodéwadmí, or keepers of the fire—migrated to the Chicago region from what’s now Niagara Falls in the late 1600s, settling along the Calumet, Chicago, and Des Plaines Rivers. At the start of the 18th century, their territory stretched westward from Lake Michigan to the Fox River Valley and south all the way to Lake Peoria.

Andrew Jackson’s Indian Removal Act of 1830, followed by the Chicago Treaty of 1833, ultimately removed thousands of Potawatomi from their homes and forced them onto the “Trail of Death” from the Great Lakes region to reservations beyond the Mississippi, in Missouri, Iowa, and Kansas. Citizen Potawatomi Nation is now based in Shawnee, Oklahoma.

Today, only ten native fluent speakers of Bodewadmimwen remain. They are all over 70 and most of them live in Wisconsin.

“After taking our lands the government began a policy of forced assimilation,” explains Justin Neely, Citizen Potawatomi Nation’s language department director and the force behind the new interactive dictionary. “What better way to force a people to assim-

ilate than to take away the children and raise them in boarding schools, teaching them the dominant culture, devoid of our language and cultural ways? Our elders had to overcome countless struggles to maintain our language.”

The dictionary features more than 8,500 words, their definitions and pronunciations, as well as audio recordings so you can hear exactly how each word is pronounced by a native speaker and video clips that highlight their cultural significance. Click on *bezgwabote*, maple syrup, for example, and you’ll be directed to a video showcasing the traditional process of tapping trees for the sweet sap; tap *winagé* and you’ll hear a traditional story centered upon a wily buzzard.

“The ultimate goal is to make the language accessible to everyone,” says Neely. “We created this as a tool for helping folks to learn and start using our language.”

Adds Jennifer Bell, director of public information for Citizen Potawatomi Nation, “People who are not of Potawatomi heritage can learn the language to learn more about the culture and history of the tribe. By learning the language they can help preserve a part of not just Potawatomi history, but the history of North America. I think it’s a way to enrich their lives.”

The dictionary will be continuously updated with new words, images, and audio and video clips. The CPN language department team is also hoping to create an app.

Neely himself didn’t learn his ancestral language until he was an adult.

“Growing up [in Kansas City, Missouri],” he says, “I always knew I was Potawatomi. I knew

some of our history and culture, but didn’t know our language. One day when I was about 18 years old, I attended a meeting where an old man stood and prayed in the language. Once I heard the language, I was hooked. I always told people I was Potawatomi and was proud of this fact but wondered, how could I truly say I was Potawatomi when I couldn’t even speak our language?”

Neely dedicated himself to learning Bodewadmimwen. “The language is a living, breathing thing. Once it gets ahold of you, it moves you. It takes you places you never thought you would go. It lead me to interactions with numerous fluent traditional people. It took me to the Hannahville Potawatomi Community, located in the heart of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, where I taught Potawatomi for two school years at Nah tah Wahsh Indian school. I’ve now been teaching my language for over 16 years and have been actively learning my language for over half my life.”

Neely hopes that this dictionary will help resurrect Bodewadmimwen, one of the first languages spoken around the Great Lakes. “It’s through our language we see what was important to our ancestors and what continues to be important. The language is like a portal into the past and at the same time a portal into the future. It’s who we are, it’s who we were, and it’s who we will become. Our language is thousands of years old. We were not allowed to speak our language for many years but still our language continues. It’s the language of the earth.” ■

Twitter @amybizzarri

LIT

Erasing the line between *us* and *them*

In *An American Summer*, Alex Kotlowitz creates a portrait of a city battling intractable ills.

By **DMITRY SAMAROV**

“I’m not afraid of dying. What I’m afraid of is losing my mother, of being in prison, of being a failure. I’m afraid of living,” a resident of a halfway house on the West Side tells Alex Kotlowitz in his new book *An American Summer*. It is but one of the countless heartrending insights the author gleaned from interviews with some 200 crime victims and perpetrators, their loved ones, and observers of violence on the streets of Chicago in the summer of 2013. The result is a crazy-quilt portrait of life in a city at war with itself. By giving voices and faces to those touched by violence, Kotlowitz makes the reader bear witness in a way news headlines and academic studies cannot. He erases the line between us and them.

The narrative begins in May of 2013 and ends in September of the same year, but often flashes back decades or a couple of years forward. It’s a structure that allows Kotlowitz to make connections not only between his interviewees’ pasts and futures, but also to those of their loved ones and to the city as a whole. In a few instances, he follows a single person’s story through the summer. Thus, although the book is a patchwork of episodes, connections and larger themes emerge. Sometimes the protagonist of one chapter appears as a bit player in another. Even when Kotlowitz’s subjects don’t know one another, they’re part of an ecosystem with the same recurring issues.

A high schooler does the right thing by naming the shooter he witnessed, but gets harassed and ultimately killed for testifying. An overnight reporter’s work covering the city’s murders takes its toll on his own well-being. A middle-aged man battles heroin addiction—but the drug is the only thing

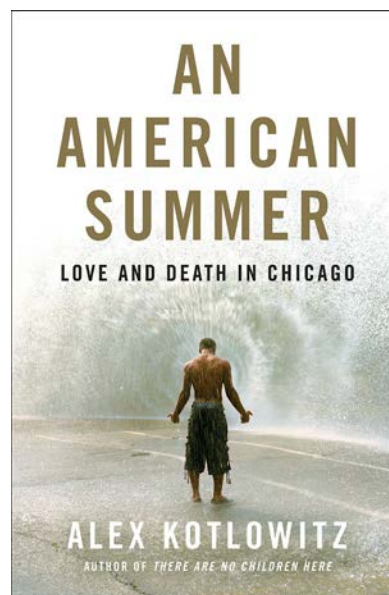
that makes the fire that killed half his family when he was a child melt from his consciousness. An A student fights the impulse to commit robberies with his childhood friends. Each chapter carefully delineates the opposing forces within people forever changed by violence.

Perhaps the central insight of the book is that repeated exposure to violence does not desensitize, as is often assumed. The people Kotlowitz interviews are not numbed to the death and trauma around them. The horrific events they describe are never far from their consciousness. They may survive and move on, but they are never truly “over it.” No matter how hard they try to blot them out via drugs or mental gymnastics, the things they’ve witnessed become part of their waking and sleeping life. Kotlowitz isn’t shy about criticizing failed strategies to stop the violence, such as the one proposed by former Illinois senator Mark Kirk to eradicate gangs (Kirk had proposed locking up every member of the Gangster Disciples). With gang leaders long behind bars, their former empires fractured into tiny cliques that war over individual city blocks rather than entire neighborhoods. The Chicago Police Department has a gang database that has been criticized as inaccurate and out of date. Thus, locking up everyone with a gang affiliation would be untenable and likely ineffective, further splintering already-fragile communities.

If one were to base one’s view of Chicago’s African-American and Latinx communities solely on news reports, the picture would be of a war zone populated by roaming gangsters and cowering victims. Kotlowitz’s work over several books, as well as the documentary *The Interrupters*, which he coproduced, weaves a much more complex tapestry of the

forces that contribute to violence in the city. Economic instability, addiction, racism, and the collapse of familial structures all play a part. Kotlowitz has no prescriptive cures. He’s not a polemicist, but rather a keenly empathetic witness. He prefers to describe the conditions that trouble him (and should trouble every citizen of Chicago), rather than offer answers. “Many parents take out life insurance policies on their children, not because they’re looking to profit off a child’s death but rather they are assured of having funds for their funeral,” he muses after a particularly wrenching interview.

It’s a heartfelt and, at times, surprisingly hopeful portrait of a city battling intractable ills. By giving each and every person he talks to the time and respect to tell his or her story, Kotlowitz evokes fully dimensional human beings rather than the statistics or caricatures most of us are used to in reports on “bad” neighborhoods. The fear that makes children avoid blocks ruled by rival gangs is the same fear that makes “south side” and “west side” synonymous with “murder and mayhem” to certain segments of the population. In fact, as this book demonstrates over and over again, these neighborhoods are filled with all kinds of people, with names and unique personalities, and all the same aspirations as might be found among the inhabitants of the toniest suburb. It’s a simple and perhaps obvious insight, but a necessary one at a time when this city and country seem as divided as they’ve ever been. **R**



LIT

Meltdown at Pitchfork

An excerpt from *Music to My Eyes*

By **DMITRY SAMAROV**

The day before Protomartyr played at Schubas, I had a meltdown at the Pitchfork Music Festival.

The publisher of my second book had generously offered me table space to hawk books, prints, and art at the Book Fort for no charge. I was also scheduled to do a reading that afternoon. But I barely lasted two hours of the three-day festival.

It was a crazy hot morning when I got there that Friday. There were already lines of kids waiting for drinks, food, free silkscreened T-shirts, and merch. I watched all the happy young people milling about and thought nothing but horrible things. Why was I here? Why were they? What was I thinking, wanting to sell my crap to these people? Why would I want to sell anything to anybody at all? The relentless sun was no help. I don’t respond well to heat under the best circumstances, but combined with being in a place I didn’t want to be, it made for a cocktail of impenetrable darkness inside my head.

I mumbled some likely incomprehensible apology, packed up my things, and got the hell out of there. I was gone before the first band played a note.

I had a ticket to see Ex Hex at the Bottle that night but was too thrown by what had happened earlier to want to leave the ➔



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house. Protomartyr was to play the next day at the festival, then go across town to Schubas. I made myself go back outside to see them.

There's a gauntlet to run when seeing shows at Schubas. That gauntlet is the bro bar one must traverse to get to the music room in the back. Every time I've ever been there the front and the back seem like separate ecosystems. Rowdy Cubbie fans dominate the bar no matter the season, while the type of people in the music room depends entirely on what band is playing. It's an odd, sometimes uncomfortable negotiation getting from one world to the other.

Before I got to Schubas, I had deleted Instagram from my iPhone. It was the last social network I belonged to. I'd signed up a few months earlier, just before I'd deleted my Twitter account, which I'd used compulsively for the previous seven years. I figured Instagram might be more manageable and less all-consuming, but it turned out not to quell any of the cravings, while delivering little of the rush which Twitter's pellet-sized but never-ending updates gave. (Instagram was methadone to Twitter's heroin.) After I made a sketch of the opener, Bully, I reached for my phone to snap a pic and post it before realizing there was nowhere to post it to.

Protomartyr came on and I made another drawing. This time I just scanned the packed room afterwards and realized I likely didn't know a soul here.

Without the veil of social media my situ-

ation was laid plain: I was a weird forty-five-year-old in a club full of much younger people who had probably followed these bands from Union Park after roasting all day in the sun. They were sunburned, sweaty, and woozy from booze and whatever else they'd ingested, but mostly they were drunk on music. At least we had that in common.

When I got home, I scanned the sketches and uploaded them to my website. Then I looked up the bands' websites and emailed them their drawings. After a decade, starting with MySpace around 2005, there would be no common area for me to share this work anymore. I would now have to address each and every subject of my sketches personally if I wanted them to look.

In the weeks that followed I got several e-mails from social media acquaintances worried about my sanity. I found out quickly just how few actual friends I have. Without the convenience of a shared platform most of my "friends" don't want to bother. Meanwhile life goes on.

I go and sketch at more shows than ever, even though the instant gratification/approval of Twitter and Instagram is gone. I've found out I don't need it. Every now and again someone at a show will notice me sketching and ask to take a picture. Sometimes these photos end up on social media and I'll come across them sometime later. But they're like rumors from a faraway town, rather than news from my own.

I've never gone back to Pitchfork either, and have no plans to ever do so again. **R**

DMITRY SAMAROV



America's Hidden Stories: The General Was Female? COURTESY SMITHSONIAN CHANNEL

HISTORY

Was Casimir Pulaski intersex?

A new documentary gives the general a coming-out party 240 years after his death.

By NICO LANG

Casimir Pulaski is getting a coming-out party almost three centuries late. The Polish nobleman and Revolutionary War hero who saved George Washington's life was intersex, according to a soon-to-air documentary.

The revelation's origins date back to 1996, when researchers in Savannah, Georgia, began investigating skeletal remains deposited in the city's Casimir Pulaski Monument. During the 19th century, the bones had been moved to the 54-foot obelisk in Monterey Square from an unmarked grave on a rundown plantation. Study of the findings, however, raised intriguing questions. The skeleton's wide pelvis suggested that the deceased was a woman.

Two decades of research have determined the remains were, indeed, Pulaski's. After the original investigation into the deceased's

identity was dropped due to insufficient DNA evidence, it was reopened four years ago. Virginia Hutton Estabrook, a professor of anthropology at Georgia Southern University, and graduate student Lisa Powell combed through old bone samples and notes left behind from 19 years earlier.

What they uncovered was startling. The facial bone structure matches 18th-century portraits of Pulaski, which, in turn, have a startling similarity to medical diagrams of individuals with congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH), a condition frequently associated with intersex variation. Individuals born with CAH often produce excess testosterone, which may lead to genitalia that do not correspond with typically male or female traits in people with XX chromosomes.

Although CAH is among the most common causes of intersex variations, it's not the sole

ARTS & CULTURE

determinant of whether a child will be born intersex. Overall, estimates suggest there are up to 5.5 million intersex people in the United States today—a population that's roughly the size of Minnesota's.

Many people are unaware of their intersex status, but the evidence surrounding Pulaski's is extremely compelling. His baptismal records claim the ceremony had to be performed at home due to *ob debilitatis causam*, signifying an unspecified deformity. Examination of the skull revealed an atypically large pituitary gland, which is responsible for the release of hormones in the body. And after comparing a femur found in the Pulaski monument to a tooth belonging to his maternal great grand-niece, a mitochondrial DNA match proved the remains were Pulaski's.

The 23-year investigation is the subject of a 50-minute documentary special set to air on the Smithsonian Channel Monday night as part of its "America's Hidden Stories" series. Hida Vioria, an intersex activist and writer interviewed in the program, says the findings are nothing short of a "dream come true."

"The discovery that Casimir Pulaski was intersex is something that I never thought I'd be able to see [in my lifetime] because it's not often that you have a chance to excavate someone's remains and run an autopsy," says Vioria, author of *Born Both: An Intersex Life* and founding director of the Intersex Campaign for Equality, in a phone interview. "I was always aware that given our population numbers, we have ancestors. I was sad about the thought that we would never know what amazing people have been intersex throughout history."

Pulaski joins an extremely exclusive club of historical figures identified as intersex. Herculine Barbin, born in 19th century France, won the right to be legally classified as male after being assigned female at birth. Barbin's posthumous memoirs helped inform Michel Foucault's groundbreaking research on human sexuality.

Examples like Barbin are few and far between, according to Victor Salvo, founder of the Legacy Project, an educational program designed to teach youth about the contributions of LGBTQ people throughout history. One of the difficulties with locating trans, gender nonconforming, and intersex people within that narrative is that their identities are often discovered only after death, and that information may be suppressed due to the prevailing mores of the era.

Salvo cites the example of Albert Cashier, a transgender Civil War soldier whose identity was uncovered after his death in 1915. People like Cashier, who was born in 1843, were forced to live in secrecy. According to Salvo, they "didn't leave written manifestos" because it was "effectively confessing to a crime." The nation's first ban on individuals wearing "dress not belonging to his or her sex" in public places was instituted in 1848.

"You're talking about an entire class of people whose only hope for being left to live in peace was to erase evidence of their own existence," Salvo says in a phone interview. "Because of that, [LGBTQ and intersex people] have been literally redacted out of history."

The Smithsonian special is well-timed for Illinois, where Pulaski's memory holds tremendous weight. In honor of Chicago's Polish community, former Mayor Harold Washington designated the first Monday in March as Casimir Pulaski Day back in 1986.

In March, the Illinois House passed a bill requiring public schools to teach LGBTQ history. Should the state senate and Governor J.B. Pritzker approve the legislation, Pulaski could soon be taught as part of that curriculum.

Israel Wright, former executive director of the LGBT Hall of Fame at the Chicago History Museum, says Pulaski could help fill gaps in local history where the lives of intersex people should be. The Hall of Fame, which was founded in 1991, has yet to induct an intersex person. While nearly 50 trans individuals have been honored in the decades since, the original class of inductees was entirely made up of cis people.

Wright says that having someone with Pulaski's significance represent the intersex community is "remarkable."

"It acknowledges and embraces a segment of the community by saying 'Yes, you count' and 'Yes, you have meaning,'" he says. "It gives you hope that things are getting better—that we're getting to a point of understanding."

But while the findings have a particular relevance for Chicagoans, it could have a major impact on the way intersex people are viewed around the world. Although Pulaski lived as a man, many children born with CAH are assigned female and subjected to invasive surgeries to "correct" any perceived variance in their genitalia. This practice, which originated at Johns Hopkins University in the 1950s, has been condemned by the United Nations and three former U.S. surgeons general. Johns

Hopkins says it no longer performs intersex surgery, yet the procedure remain common.

Pulaski was born before such medical interventions became an option. Had he been alive two centuries later, his life could have been very different. As a woman, Pulaski wouldn't have had the opportunity to volunteer for the Continental Army and aid in the reform of the American cavalry. He wouldn't have led Washington through an escape route at the Battle of Brandywine, when he otherwise would have faced certain death.

Without an intersex person at the front lines living as themselves, Chicago-based intersex activist Pidgeon Pagonis says, the reality is that America "would still be a colony."

"The father of the American cavalry was not even male by our scientific definition," Vioria adds. "It's a powerful testament to the fact that biology doesn't dictate who we are in terms of our lived gender, our perceived gender, and our ability to thrive as any gender." 

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THEATER

‘No one ever wrote a fairy tale about polyamory!’

Despite the legally mandated nudity, there’s no happily-ever-after in *Afterglow*.

Inclusion of full and frequent nudity is so vital to the gay throuple drama *Afterglow* that, according to playwright S. Asher Gelman, a production’s failure to include it “will result in legal action.” In the case of Pride Films & Plays’s current staging, Gelman should feel comfortable putting that cease and desist letter back in his drawer. Be it silently bathing in the background, laying on a massage table, or sitting around a bed postcoital, director David Zak’s handsome cast spends almost as much time onstage stripped down to their skivvies as not. From the tonal self-seriousness of Gelman’s flimsy relationship-study dialogue, though, I don’t know if he’d call them nude—rather, they’re the far-more-dramatic *bare*.

Husbands Alex (Jacob Barnes) and Josh (Rich Holton), both thirtysomething New Yorkers, invite Darius (Jesse James Montoya), a younger single guy getting his footing in the city, into their open relationship for friendship and—as much as it exists—platonic sex. Predictably, the couple’s ground rules are broken, romantic feelings present complications, and, with straight faces, the men yell cringy lines like “No one wrote a fairy tale about polyamory!” and “You know why there’s no *Pretty Woman II*?” at one another as if they were devastating truths penned by Tennessee Williams.

Afterglow’s efforts to have it both ways—like in a peculiar, ceremonious opening movement/strip number set to a cheesy R&B song—somehow manages to be less lascivious yet more uncomfortable than the unambiguous, sex-positive boy-lesque shows it aims to elevate itself from. —**DAN JAKES** *AFTERGLOW* Through 5/5: Wed-Sat 8 PM, Sun 4 PM, Pride Arts Center, 4147 N. Broadway, 773-857-0222, pridefilmsandplays.com, \$30-\$40, \$25 students, seniors, and military (except Sat).

Pretty as a pastry

Anastasia recreates the animated feature with fewer animals and more Bolsheviks.

Fox gave Disney a run for its money when it released the 1997 animated feature film *Anastasia*, about an amnesiac orphan who might be the lost daughter of the last czar of Russia. With a winning formula of cute animal sidekicks, catchy musical numbers, and a quest for identity, *Anastasia* tapped into every girl’s presumed desire to be a princess and find romance. The 2017 musical, with book by Terrence McNally, music by Stephen Flaherty, and lyrics by Lynn Ahrens, nixes the sidekicks and turns up the Russian revolutionary history a notch for a visually stunning family-friendly show with few surprises.

Anya (Lila Coogan), a sweeper scrapping on the streets of Leningrad, meets Dmitry (Stephen Brower) and Vlad (Edward Staudenmayer) just as they are auditioning women to pose as the lost grand duchess. They want reward money, she wants exit papers, and they strike a deal—only to find that Anya recalls more than what they’ve fed her. Now they only have to worry about the Bolsheviks, who want to finish exterminating the ruling class, and securing the approval of a dowager empress sick of having her heart broken by gold-digging frauds.

The snow whirls in lacy eddies in Russia; the trees are flush with effulgent masses of blooms in France; all of Europe races by, meadows rising up and receding as a skeleton trolley of a train rattles along; unfathomable wealth, summarized by ball gowns, jewels, and waltzes; the streets of Paris. If you’re craving a Broadway musical as pretty as a pastry, *Anastasia* does the trick. —**IRENE HSIAO** *ANASTASIA* Through 4/7: Wed 2 and 7:30 PM, Thu-Fri 7:30 PM, Sat 2 and 8 PM, Sun 2 PM, Nederlander Theatre, 24 W. Randolph, 312-977-1700, broadwayinchicago.com, \$27-\$123.

Father and son(s) Writers Theatre strips down *A Number* to its absorbing essentials.

Logging in at a little more than an hour, Writers Theatre’s production of Caryl Churchill’s 2002 two-hander is a brief and thought-provoking meditation on human character and identity. Set in the near future, at a time when the cloning of human beings is medically possible though not yet socially accepted, the play consists of a series of conversations between a father and son, all concerned with the son’s discovery that he is just one of “a number” of clones. To reveal more would spoil this taut, twisty, tightly written tale. The beauty of the play is how much Churchill is able to pack into a mere 65 minutes.

Robin Witt’s lean and somber production emphasizes everything that is sleek in Churchill’s stripped-down script. Her two actors, William Brown and Nate Burger, deliver perfectly crafted performances, sometimes underplaying their delivery to make the audience lean closer to the action. Brown’s performance is especially nuanced: he can do a lot with the smallest gesture or the slightest shift in the tone of his voice, qualities you need in a play as packed with laconic lines as this one.

The script is dry, and even witty at times, though the director and her actors downplay the comic turns. That is just as well, because the somber audience who saw the show with me was in no mood for laughter. No loss. The play is just as absorbing when it’s played straight.

Courtney O’Neill’s set—consisting of little more than a few chairs, a table, and a lamp in a simple room with bland walls—is almost as sparse as Churchill’s dialogue. —**JACK HELBIG** *A NUMBER* Through 6/9: Wed-Fri 7:30 PM, Sat 3 and 7:30 PM, Sun 2 and 6 PM, Tue 7:30 PM; no performance Sun 4/21, 6 PM, Writers Theatre, 325 Tudor Ct., Glencoe, 847-242-6000, writerstheatre.org, \$50-\$80.

The horror! The horror!

Into the heart of *The Ridiculous Darkness*

Wolfram Lotz’s fractured take on Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (and its famous cinematic version, *Apocalypse Now*) started out as a radio script, inspired by the 2010 trial of Somali pirates in Hamburg. In Side-show Theatre Company’s hallucinatory staging of Lotz’s script (translated by Daniel Brunet and adapted by director Ian Damont Martin), we’re thrust into a disjointed world that moves between “Oaktown” (aka Oakland, California), where a young pirate (Meagan Dilworth) faces trial and offers a meandering explanation to the court, and a dark river journey straight out of Conrad.

With a combination of physical theater and dance, projections, sound, and a nimble ensemble playing a variety of roles, Martin’s staging keeps us off balance and occasionally befuddled. But as Lotz’s story becomes less about piracy and more about state-sanctioned vio-



Yen MICHAEL BROSILOW

lence in the age of Black Lives Matter, it takes on more urgency and clarity. The dynamic between RJW Mays’s stolid Sergeant Pellner, sent to liquidate a mysterious rogue colonel, and his eager-to-please-but-fearful assistant, Stefan Dorsch (Brittani Yawn) jackknives between small humorous interludes and growing clammy desperation.

This is a show that works better in pieces than as a whole. Some of the discursive moments distract just as we feel we’re getting to, well, the heart of the dark matter. But Martin mostly knows how to ratchet up the tension effectively. By the end, we’re overwhelmed with a barrage of images and sounds that leave us questioning the very nature of justice itself. —**KERRY REID** *THE RIDICULOUS DARKNESS* Through 4/28: Thu-Sat 8 PM, Sun 2:30 PM, Victory Gardens Theater, 2433 N. Lincoln, 773-871-3000, victorygardens.org, \$20-\$30, \$15 students and seniors.

Mean moms

Who’s *The Worst Mother in the World*?

The world premiere of Kari Bentley-Quinn’s one-act marks Halcyon Theatre’s last production under Tony Adams’s artistic direction and presents a fitting representation of the theater’s commitment to diversity and inclusion in storytelling. Simply, it’s a story about mommy issues, but the suspenseful script and all-female cast work together to create a portrait of three complicated, sometimes awful, sometimes sympathetic women.

Nina, played by Susaan Jamshidi with guts and authenticity, is stuck in a pit of despair after the birth of her son. Her supportive husband isn’t helping matters with his relentless energy and happiness (a plot line that could use some additional exploration), and Nina finds herself in the office of Bonnie, her therapist, seeking answers and relief from her nightmares, depression, and anxiety.

Bonnie (Jenn Adams in a multilayered and captivating performance) reveals herself to be a therapist who struggles to find her off switch, especially when confronted by the return of her prodigal daughter, Mary (Kianna Rose), who has big news. Bonnie reacts poorly, playing the martyr and calling herself an “emotional hostage” to Mary’s years of poor decisions and bad behavior. Once Nina meets Mary, everything spirals as all three women struggle to be honest with one another and themselves while maintaining critical personal and professional boundaries.

In addition to shedding much-needed light on postpartum anxiety and depression, the story provides a new perspective on trust, trauma, and women’s ability to lift one another up and tear one another down. —**MARISSA OBERLANDER** *THE WORST MOTHER IN THE WORLD* Through 5/4: Thu-Sat 8 PM, Sun 6 PM; no performance Sun 4/21, Christ Lutheran Church, 4541 N. Spaulding, halcyontheatre.org, 773-413-0454, \$20 in advance or free at the door.

Lost boys

Yen shows two neglected teenagers struggling to grow up.

What happens when people are truly left to their own devices? The first minutes of Anna Jordan’s 2015 play about two brothers raising themselves on a diet of porn, video games, and junk food in a garbage-laden London council estate flat are abrasive and over the top. It takes some time to suspend one’s disbelief enough to buy that two young men are portraying a 16- and 13-year-old. But as more and more details of their lives emerge, it becomes a devastating portrait of the effects of neglect, building to a violent but inevitable climax. It starts as grotesque comedy but ends in tragedy.

A dog named Taliban—never seen, but often heard growling and barking from the filthy bedroom the boys have ceded to it—is a four-legged embodiment of their existence: abandoned, underfed, but desperately longing for love. When a neighbor girl enters their world—initially drawn by the dog’s cries—the boys are forced to try to grow up, and the results are traumatic for everyone involved.

The cast’s four talented actors not only pull off convincing British accents but also manage to make their sometimes repugnant characters lovable. Their ugliness is real and can’t be helped. The evocative set and lighting, by Joe Schermoly and Claire Chrzan respectively, creates a recurring nightmare of a little world. Its inhabitants snipe at each other in feral attempts to connect. They can’t help the way they are. They’re still human, but just barely. Elly Green directed. —**DMITRY SAMAROV** *YEN* Through 5/5: Thu-Sat 8 PM, Sun 3:30 PM, Raven Theatre, 6157 N. Clark, 773-338-2177, \$43-\$46, \$38-\$41 seniors and teachers, \$15 students and military.



Go Back to China

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FILM

FESTIVAL PREVIEW

What does it mean to be Asian American?

The 24th Asian American Showcase attempts to find out.

By **NINA LI COOMES**

“Asian American” is a difficult identity to define. Culturally speaking, the term “Asian American” is tasked with the near-impossible job of representing people with origins in nations as disparate as India and South Korea, who speak languages ranging from Japanese to Tagalog. Routes of immigration to the U.S. vary widely among Asian Americans: some came to this country as refugees of the Vietnam war, while others can trace their history back to the building of the Central Pacific Railroad in the 1860s. Demographically speaking, Asian Americans are extremely diverse, part of both the wealthiest 10 percent and poorest 10 percent of this country. Some occupy positions of immense privilege while others face deportation, arrest, and mistreatment. The fastest-growing minority population in the U.S. according to the 2010 census, Asian Americans represent a motley monolith, with no one easy narrative or descriptor.

It’s this population that the Foundation for Asian American Independent Media pays

homage to in its 24th Annual Asian American Showcase. A mix of shorts, documentaries, and feature films round out the 12-day program, with meditations on self, home, and belonging providing a unifying undercurrent throughout.

The festival opens with *Go Back to China*, a feature film directed by Emily Ting about a Chinese American socialite who, as punishment for spending half her trust fund, is forced to leave behind her cushy life in L.A. and return to China to help run her father’s toy factory. YouTuber Anna Akana plays said socialite with sardonic aplomb, while veteran Hong Kong comedic actor Richard Ng adds complications to the father figure, giving him depth beyond being a simple nag. Light and airy, the film plays like a rom-com without romance, brushing over issues of identity and self without seriously engaging them, effectively acting as an aperitif for the rest of the showcase.

Next on the schedule is *Origin Story*, a documentary by Laotian American comedian, actress, and writer Kulap Vilaysack. At the ➔



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age of 14, Vilaysack discovered during a family argument that the man who'd raised her was not in fact her biological father. Twenty years after that painful revelation, she sets out in search of her birth father, ultimately traveling to Laos to meet him. Vilaysack's documentary is searingly honest; her examination of her biological parent's very real failures is unflinching, as is the on-camera exploration of her own pain and hurt. As one of several films that feature an Asian American returning to Asia to learn something about themselves, *Origin Story* distinguishes itself by being critical and self-aware, acting as a much-needed breath of fresh air among the other selections.

The short film program, titled "Asian American Dreams," feels like a jewelry box, each short film a gem of drama, whimsy, and imagination. Among them are A.M. Lukas's poignant *One Cambodian Family Please For My Pleasure*, starring Emily Mortimer as a Czechoslovakian woman who, in 1981, writes to a refugee resettlement agency in order to sponsor a Cambodian family in Fargo, North Dakota. *Kim Chi*, directed by Jackson Kiyoshi Segars, explores the tensions between a Korean American family and their daughter's Japanese American fiancée, commenting on the distinctly Asian American experience of how cultures once in conflict can now converge. Jingjing Tian's *Cowboy Joe* shows us a Chinese American cowboy ambling through an electric Manhattan, while Youthana Yous's *Buffalo Nickel* gives us wistful hilarity in its portrayal of an Indian American woman's run-in with social media.

The standout among the feature length films is *Seadrift*. Directed by Tim Tsai, this documentary follows the resettlement of Vietnamese refugees to a majority-white Texan town on the Gulf Coast, telling the story of gradually building racial tension that culminates in the fatal shooting of a white resident; this ultimately attracts the attention and arrival of the KKK. Tsai is careful in his exposition of a convoluted situation, deftly coaxing stories from white and Vietnamese residents alike, teasing out themes of nationalism and unexpected forgiveness. Though the film ostensibly deals with an isolated incident in a tiny town that occurred 40 years ago, this story feels at once immediately salient and universal, as

if an insightful fable for our own troubling times.

Ulam: Main Dish, a documentary directed by Alexandra Cuervo, highlights various Filipino American chefs and their endeavor to share the tastes of Filipino cuisine. Beautifully shot in a style reminiscent of Netflix's *Chef's Table*, Cuervo doesn't limit the documentary's scope to simple food porn, but instead contextualizes Filipino cuisine in histories of diaspora and cultures that emphasize family, sustenance, and sharing. (A side note: if you get hungry after watching *Ulam*, I suggest heading to Merla's Kitchen on Kimball for your own Filipino fix.) *Nailed It*, another documentary, this one directed by Adele Free Pham, takes up the nail salon and its seeming ubiquity, attempting to understand just how it was that Vietnamese Americans became so enmeshed in the American nail industry. She uncovers a moving story that weaves together accounts of refugee resettlement, the need to provide for family, and, very unexpectedly, Tippi Hedren of Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*. Pham's documentary also touches on the relationship between the black American and Vietnamese American communities within the nail salon, but curiously, it shies away from directly commenting on recent conflicts between Asian American nail salon workers in Brooklyn and their black customers.

The festival ends with *Fiction and Other Realities*, a feature film directed by Steve Lee and Bobby Choy about a Korean American man who returns to Korea as a roadie on his (truly terrible, very mean, and racist) white friend's band's tour. There, he meets what can only be described as the Korean version of a manic pixie dream girl, whereupon he decides to stay past his planned short visit to discover himself, among other things. This montage-heavy film underscores a tension that can be observed across almost all of the offerings of the Asian American Showcase: caught between being American and being Asian, Asian Americans are perpetual foreigners wherever they go. For Lee and Choy, the answer to this conundrum is oscillating and unclear. For the Showcase itself, it seems it is an open-ended question with many pluripotent outcomes for the audience to ponder as the credits roll. 

 @nlcoomes



Ash Is Purest White

REVIEW

Prisoners of the universe

With *Ash Is Purest White*, Jia Zhang-ke remains the master of displacement.

By BEN SACHS

About two-thirds of the way into *Ash Is Purest White*, the latest triumph by Chinese master Jia Zhang-ke, the heroine, Qiao (Zhao Tao, Jia's regular leading lady), meets a strange man on a train heading north from the central province of Hubei. Qiao was recently released from prison after serving a five-year term; after tracking down her boyfriend, who didn't bother to meet her upon her release, she discovered that he had taken up with another woman while Qiao was in jail. Qiao intends to return to her hometown of Datong, though she's not sure what she'll do there. Feeling rudderless, she listens to the strange man with rapt attention, as if looking for a sign for what to do with her life. He says he's headed to an area near the border with Inner Mongolia, where he plans to set up a tourism company that will take people to places where others have claimed to see UFOs. Qiao lies and claims that she's seen a flying saucer herself, perhaps to earn the stranger's trust. He concludes the spiel about his prospective business by saying, "The bottom line is, we're all prisoners of the universe."

Qiao ditches her plans and joins the strange man (the film never reveals his name), boarding a train at the next station for Urumqi. This unexpected development—which makes one feel as if the narrative could now go anywhere—is one of the strongest expressions to date in Jia's work of the feeling of dis-

placement, the unifying theme of the writer-director's formidable filmography. Jia's characters are regularly displaced, whether by the powers of history (as in *Platform*, his saga of the rise of individualist culture in the 1980s), globalization (as in *The World*, his look at multinational workers at a Beijing theme park), government (as in *Still Life*, which took place in Fengjie before national agencies would flood the city to make way for the Three Gorges Dam), or corruption (as in *A Touch of Sin*, his anthology film about Chinese social ills). In this passage of *Ash Is Purest White*, a sense of displacement overwhelms the film entirely, suggesting that Jia can no longer direct the course of his own story. Few movies convey rootlessness so palpably.

Ash spans a period of roughly 17 years, and one of the more compelling things about the film is how you can never predict when Jia will flash forward in time. It's one of those movies (like Wong Kar-wai's *Happy Together* or Kent Jones's forthcoming *Diane*) in which time exists as an autonomous force; neither the characters nor even the filmmaker can do much about it. Ironically this sense of feeling adrift in time makes the characters feel chronically stuck—"prisoners of the universe" is as good a term for it as any—and their awareness of their entrapment gives *Ash* its tragic heft. The film is above all a sad one, following two people as they gradually lose control over

★★★★ EXCELLENT ★★★ GOOD ★★ AVERAGE ★ POOR ● WORTHLESS

Ash Is Purest White ★★★★★

Directed by Jia Zhang-ke. In Mandarin with subtitles. 136 min.
Landmark's Century Centre Cinema.

their lives. One could read their story as an allegory about how China's market-driven society, with its absence of a social safety net, denies citizens a sense of security. Yet the film also succeeds on a purely dramatic level, as Jia crafts complex characters with rich emotional lives who are capable of surprising you with their actions.

As in many tragedies, the principal characters of *Ash* are happy when the story begins. The film opens in 2001, when Qiao is the pampered girlfriend of a gangster named Guo Bin (Liao Fan). Bin's crime family is thriving, and the "brothers" throw around money with heedless pleasure (that is, when they have to spend it—the family wields so much power in their community that people frequently offer to provide them with services for free). Jia presents their lives seductively. Working with the great French cinematographer Eric Gautier, he keeps the camera moving almost constantly, as if eager to take in as much of their activity as possible, and lights many of the early scenes under a romantic neon green. One can get absorbed in the confidence with which Qiao and Bin go through their daily lives (the way Qiao takes Bin's cigarette to inhale a drag off it is a sight to behold), and indeed the characters seem absorbed in their own cool themselves. Qiao is apathetic when she hears reports that local miners are getting laid off and that many workers are being displaced to another city to learn to drill for oil. She also looks down on her father for trying to expose the corruption of the village leader. Qiao is so wrapped up in being a gangster's moll that she disregards what's going on around her—unfortunately for her, she will come to pay for her apathy.

Soon a rising crime syndicate starts to stake out turf in Bin's region, killing his boss and sending armed thugs to attack Bin and his brothers. Just when things seem to be going poorly for Bin and Qiao, they get even worse. One night a group of men armed with blunt objects stop Bin and Qiao's car, pull Bin out, and try to beat him to death. Qiao, having been taught to fire a gun a few scenes earlier, steps out, fires Bin's weapon in the air, and chases the assailants away. In the next scene, Qiao is in handcuffs, being interrogated by police. She refuses to admit that the gun was Bin's, effectively taking the rap for his possession of a weapon. Jia then cuts abruptly to Qiao walking in a prison yard, the lighting now cool and bluish to signal a shift to a more somber emotional register. Jia reduces

the heroine's five-year sentence to just a few scenes, then shuttles the film forward to the next major passage, when the newly released Qiao goes to Fengjie to look for Bin, who got out of jail four years earlier.

Qiao's misadventures in Fengjie deliberately recall the events of Jia's *Still Life*, which was made around the time these scenes take place. As in the earlier film, Zhao Tao plays an emotionally vulnerable woman looking to reconnect with a missing lover; what's different is that her character here has fewer resources at her disposal to guide her journey. A grifter steals her wallet on her way to find Bin, and her quest leads her to the knowledge that her old boyfriend has left the criminal underworld and has found a new girlfriend in the white-collar sector. Qiao relies on her old confidence and ingenuity to scam some men out of money and get in touch with Bin, but her efforts leave her unhappy. Jia stages the old lovers' reunion in one of the longest single takes of *Ash Is Purest White*, in a lonely hotel room that conveys the characters' emotional distance from one another. (Jia and Gautier hearken back to the earlier scenes by lighting the room with neon-green light, which stands out after the yellow palette of the other Fengjie-set scenes.)

The reunion signals another shift in tone, this time to melodrama. The remaining third of *Ash* trades in heightened emotions, not only when Qiao makes the bold decision to take off with the strange man she meets on the train, but when she reunites with Bin once more in 2017. Their relationship, now based in enmity and distrust, feels like something out of a Rainer Werner Fassbinder film, as the two characters, both broken by the vicissitudes of an unjust economic system, view one another as memories of better times and thus as causes for resentment. What registers most strongly, however, is how much both characters have changed since the start of the film. Viewed now under cold, clear light, Qiao and Bin are visibly older. One notices their wrinkles and faded hair, and even their body language is markedly different. The two leads (but especially Zhao, who's incredible throughout) manage these physical changes expertly, making sure not to let them overwhelm the headstrong confidence that defined their characters at the start of the film. The way these two cling to their identities, in spite of how fate has tossed them about, is poignant, pathetic, and ultimately heartbreaking. **A**

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FILM



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RR Aparajito

The second part of Satyajit Ray's Apu trilogy (1956), fully comprehensible on its own terms, suffers at times from its episodic plot, which follows Apu from age ten in the holy city of Benares to his early adulthood in Calcutta. But this is my favorite film in the trilogy, and the reported favorite of Ray's fellow Bengali directors Ritwik Ghatak and Mrinal Sen. Its treatment of death—of Apu's father toward the beginning of the film and of his mother near the end—is among the most beautiful, mystical, and precise handlings of that subject in all of cinema, worthy of Mizoguchi; in a way the film is little more than a careful contextualizing of these two astonishing sequences. An adaptation of roughly the last fifth of Bibhutibhusan Banerjee's novel *Pather Panchali* and the first third of his subsequent novel *Aparajito*, this benefits as much as the rest of the trilogy from the ravishing "commentary" of Ravi Shankar's music. It's a mas-

terpiece for which terms like *simplicity* and *profundity* seem inadequate. In Bengali with subtitles. —**JONATHAN ROSENBAUM** 113 min. 35mm archival print. Wed 4/10, 7 and 9:30 PM. Univ. of Chicago Doc Films

RR Big Night

A movie about two Italian immigrant brothers (Tony Shalhoub and Stanley Tucci, both in fine form) who open a New Jersey restaurant called the Paradise; Shalhoub plays the artistic and temperamental chef, Tucci the more practical-minded manager (1996). Tucci wrote the script with his cousin, Joseph Tropiano, and directed it with one of his costars, Campbell Scott. Apart from offering what may well be the best advertisement for Italian cooking in movies, this little picture charms by virtue of its craft and patience; it moves at times more like a European movie than an American one, allowing its characterizations to grow on us, and the effort pays off. It also succeeds as a story about art and idealism and cultural assimilation. Others in the cast include ➔



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➔ Isabella Rossellini, Minnie Driver, Ian Holm, Marc Anthony, and Allison Janney. —**JONATHAN ROSENBAUM** *R*, 109 min. *Wed 4/10, 7:30 PM. Beverly Arts Center*

RR Birds of Passage

Ciro Guerra and Cristina Gallego's follow-up to their 2015 gem *Embrace of the Serpent* is a stunner, from the bookend device of a blind bard who spins the tale of a legend at once local and universal (echoing antique roots in Homer and *The Illiad*) to the division of this Colombian drama's narrative into five cantos, or songs, which are distant cousins to the burgeoning narcocorrido Mexican musical genre and tie this drug-smuggling tale, circa 1968-1980, to the present. What at first seems like an ethnographic chronicle of an old Wayuu tribal mating ritual—an exotic dance where a marriageable young woman (Natalia Reyes) simulates a fiery bird to be captured—soon becomes a saga about the costs that her suitor (José Acosta) shoulders in order to win over her mother, the clan's revered matriarch (Carmiña Martínez). The swain labors hard for the required dowry, but he's smart and impatient, so when he stumbles upon a group of hippie Peace Corps volunteers who preach anti-communism but are also looking for weed, his solution, in its capitalist supply-and-demand paradigm, seems obvious. The alliance he enters with his relatives who farm the marijuana whose market he soon corners will threaten the family traditions he vowed to uphold. In Wayuu and Spanish with subtitles. —**ANDREA GRONVALL** *125 min. Fri 4/5, 3:45 and 7:45 PM; Sat 4/6, 5 PM; Sun 4/7, 3 PM; Mon 4/8, 7:45 PM; Tue 4/9, 6 PM; Wed 4/10, 8 PM; and Thu 4/11, 6 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center*

RR Chimes at Midnight

Orson Welles's 1965 version of the Falstaff story, assembled from Shakespearean bits and pieces, is the one Welles film that deserves to be called lovely; there is also a rising tide of opinion that proclaims it his masterpiece. Restrained and even serene (down to its memorably muddy battle scene), it shows Welles working largely without his technical flourishes—and for those who have never seen beyond his surface flash, it is ample proof of how sensitive and subtle an artist he was. With Keith Baxter, John Gielgud, Margaret Rutherford, and Jeanne Moreau. —**DAVE KEHR** *115 min. Former Reader film critic Jonathan Rosenbaum lectures at the Tuesday screening. Fri 4/5, 4 PM, and Tue 4/9, 6 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center*

RR Good Men Good Women

This 1995 feature completes Hou Hsiao-hsien's trilogy about 20th-century Taiwan. Like its predecessors, it focuses on a specific period (in this case 1949 to '95) and art form (cinema itself). An actress prepares to play a real-life anti-Japanese guerrilla in 40s China who was arrested as a subversive after returning to Taiwan in the 50s. Images evoked by the actress's past as a drug-addicted barmaid alternate with her imaginative projections of the film about to be shot. Despite the complexity of the haunting structure, which suggests three interwoven tenses—present, past, and a curious blend of future conditional and speculative past—this is the shortest and most direct film of the trilogy, and the visual mastery is stunning. Reproaching contemporary Taiwan politically by praising the courage of an earlier generation, this film was controversial in its home country, but it's probably the most artistically accomplished feature I saw that year. In Mandarin with subtitles. —**JONATHAN ROSENBAUM** *108 min. 35mm archival print. Thu 4/11, 7 PM. Univ. of Chicago Doc Films*

N The Gospel of Eureka

Eureka Springs, Arkansas, is a town full of dualities, at least as depicted by directors Donal Mosher and Michael Palmieri. They show one man practicing his lines for a dramatic play about Jesus Christ while another gets ready for a drag performance at a local gay bar. In *Gospel of Eureka*, these are not polar opposites, though, but rather two sides of the same coin. There is a shared performance and theatricality to devout religious practices and queer subcultures—especially when those identities intersect. Mosher and Palmieri's documentary flips between these two narratives in order to come to a sense of understanding—which is emphasized when an anti-transgender bathroom bill is proposed in Eureka. In an ambitious quest to find middle ground, *Gospel of Eureka* demonstrates that a Bible Belt town can be in touch with its faith and also be on the brink of great change. —**CODY CORRALL** *75 min. Fri 4/5, 2:15 and 6:15 PM; Sat 4/6, 3 and 6:30 PM; Sun 4/7, 5:15 PM; Mon 4/8, 6:15 PM; Wed 4/10, 8 PM; and Thu 4/11, 8:30 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center*

RR Johnny Guitar

Nicholas Ray's great sur-western (1954), in which, as Francois Truffaut put it, the cowboys circle and die like ballerinas. For all its violence, this is a surpassingly tender, sensitive film, Ray's gentlest statement of his outsider theme. Joan Crawford, with a mature, reflective quality she never recaptured, is the owner of a small-town saloon; Sterling Hayden is the enigmatic gunfighter who comes to her aid when the townspeople turn on her. Filmed in the short-lived (but well-preserved) Trucolor process, its hues are pastel and boldly deployed, and the use of space is equally daring and expressive. With Mercedes McCambridge, unforgettable as Crawford's butch nemesis, as well as Ernest Borgnine, Scott Brady, John Carradine, Royal Dano, Ward Bond, and Ben Cooper. —**DAVE KEHR** *110 min. Fri 4/5, 7 and 9:30 PM; and Sun 4/7, 1:30 PM. Univ. of Chicago Doc Films*

The Little Shop of Horrors

The key film (1960) in the Roger Corman legend. Shot in two days on an invisible budget, it's one of the most grotesque and extreme of black comedies, the story of a poor schlub whose pet plant develops an appetite for human blood, crooning "Feed me! Feeeeced me!" as our hero goes out in search of fresh victims. Not for all tastes (and probably not for tasteful people at all), it's still a grungy wonder. Jack Nicholson makes an early appearance in a bit as a masochistic dental patient. —**DAVE KEHR** *72 min. 35mm archival print. Followed by a panel discussion. Mon 4/8, 7 PM. Music Box*

The Matrix

The Wachowskis turn their attention to metaphysical SF: Keanu Reeves discovers that the universe (i.e., America and environs) is run by computers that use human beings as batteries for bioelectrical energy, and that he's living not in 1999 but roughly two centuries later; Laurence Fishburne enlists Reeves to lead a revolt staffed by a small multinational crew (including kick-ass heroine Carrie-Anne Moss). This is simpleminded fun for roughly the first hour, until the movie becomes overwhelmed by its many sources—*Blade Runner* (rainy and trash-laden streets), *Men in Black* (men in dark suits with shades), *Star Wars* for mythology, *Die Hard* for skyscrapers, *Alien* for secondary characters and decor, *Superman* and *True Lies* for stunts, and *Videodrome* for paranoia. There's not much humor to keep it all life-size, and by the final

stretch it's become bloated, mechanical, and tiresome. —**JONATHAN ROSENBAUM** *R*, 136 min. 35mm. *Tue 4/9, 9:30 PM. Univ. of Chicago Doc Films*

Pulse

Japanese chillers like *Ringu* and *Ju-on* rejuvenated the horror genre by emphasizing mood over monsters, but this 2001 feature by Kiyoshi Kurosawa carries the aesthetic to a tedious extreme. The sluggish story has something to do with ghosts taking up residence on the Internet, where they peer silently from the dim recesses of webcam shots. As in many J-horror films, the visual austerity contributes to the overall creepiness, and there are some hair-raising set pieces. But the big scare scenes seem particularly isolated here, supported by neither the flat characters nor the vague plot. In Japanese with subtitles. —**J.R. JONES** *118 min. 35mm. Sun 4/7, 7 PM. Univ. of Chicago Doc Films*

RR Quadrophonia

Franc Roddam's 1979 film of the Who's rock opera aligns sociological observation and romantic fantasy to create an extravagant, involving teenpic with a responsible intellectual grounding. The dark, grimy visual style meets the Who's naive plotting straight on to create a kind of mythic realism, stirring, archetypal situations clothed in pseudodocumentary grit. The hero, a jumpy young mod played with commanding intensity by Phil Daniels, achieves one moment of perfect bliss and then self-destructs, a motif straight out of 19th-century romantic fiction. —**DAVE KEHR** *R*, 115 min. 35mm. *Thu 4/11, 9:30 PM. Univ. of Chicago Doc Films*

N Shazam!

Comic book buffs know that the DC superhero Shazam was originally named Captain Marvel when he was a mid-20th century top-selling brand for Fawcett Publications, which was forced to retire the character in 1954 after a lengthy copyright infringement case based on charges of plagiarizing *Superman*. The history helps explain part of the retro appeal of this wide-screen adaptation about a geeky foster teen, Billy Batson (Asher Angel), who assumes the alter ego and superpowers of a thirtyish hunk in red-hot tights (Zachary Levi), thanks to a powerful wizard (Djimon Hounsou). Like the early Superman, Shazam harks back to a more innocent time—the gleeful sense of wonder Levi brings to the character is endearingly goofy, as though daring rescues and crime prevention were the headiest thrills imaginable. The movie generally avoids showing graphic deaths, except in a jarring boardroom sequence where the villainous Dr. Thaddeus Sivana (a curiously wooden Mark Strong) takes ghoulish revenge on his hated brother, father, and their corporate cronies (although even this might be considered mild, given the extreme violence of video games). Adults might appreciate the nostalgic carnival atmosphere; children are more likely to identify with Angel and the other irrepressible foster family youngsters, led by the impish Jack Dylan Grazer. It's an interesting departure for Swedish horror director David F. Sandberg (*Annabelle: Creation*, *Lights Out*), who proves he has more tricks up his sleeve than just things that go bump in the night. —**ANDREA GRONVALL** *PG-13, 132 min. AMC Dine-in Block 37, ArcLight, Century 12 and CineArts 6, Chatham 14, City North 14, Ford City, Harper Theater, River East 21, Rosemont 18, Showplace 14 Galewood Crossings, Showplace ICON, 600 N. Michigan, Webster Place 11*

N Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse

Phil Lord—one half of the duo responsible for *The Lego Movie* and *22 Jump Street*—cowrote this animated Marvel Comics adaptation, and like the films he codirected, it exhibits a free-for-all wackiness reminiscent of 1930s Looney Tunes. Set in a parallel universe, the story follows a mixed-race teenage boy who transforms into Spider-Man after some baddies kill the original Spidey, Peter Parker. Those same villains have also opened up a portal to alternate realities, and soon enough, the young hero finds himself fighting crime alongside every iteration of Spider-Man in the Marvel canon. Maintaining a breathless pace, the filmmakers pile up sci-fi conceits, one-liners, and a melange of animation styles; as opposed to lots of other comic book adaptations, this actually captures the sensation of getting absorbed in a comic book. Bob Persichetti, Peter Ramsey, and Rodney Rothman directed. —**BEN SACHS** *PG, 117 min. Sat 4/6, 7 and 9:30 PM; and Sun 4/7, 4 PM. Univ. of Chicago Doc Films*

N Storm Boy

A variation on the classic boy-and-his-dog (or a girl-and-her-horse) stories, this Australian family drama centers on a kid and his pelicans. In a framing device with a strong environmentalist theme, Geoffrey Rush plays a retired businessman whose clashes with his workaholic son over a wildlife sanctuary send the old-timer flashing back to childhood. As a youth (Finn Little) he lived in an isolated shack with his widowed fisherman father (Jai Courtney); their nearest neighbor was an Aboriginal beachcomber wise in the ways of nature (Trevor Jamieson). After three pelican chicks are orphaned, the boy adopts them, and much cuteness ensues as they waddle and cavort toward maturity. Director Shawn Seet is not quite up to the more complex challenges of Justin Monjo's script (the second film adaptation of Colin Thiele's children's book), such as the father's improbable rescue from drowning, and scenes where Rush revisits his younger self, inhabiting the screen at the same time as Little, but the movie is still a serviceable entertainment for wee ones. —**ANDREA GRONVALL** *PG, 109 min. AMC Streets of Woodfield*

N Styx

This thought-provoking moral drama opens with a terrifying car crash, then shows how the heroine (Susanne Wolff), a level-headed doctor, assuredly leads a team of EMTs to treat a man injured in the accident. The scene—which director Wolfgang Fischer presents in a cool, objective style that seems to offer up each image as though it were a piece of evidence—introduces the theme of acting in life-and-death situations and prepares viewers for the complicated scenario that follows. Picking up with the doctor some time later, the story finds her sailing on a small yacht off the northern coast of Africa; she encounters a boat full of refugees that's sinking into the ocean. The doctor, acting on instinct, tries to help the passengers, even after the coast guard officer communicating with her via radio tells her not to get involved. Fischer doesn't suggest whether the doctor is right or wrong, but rather leaves it up to the audience to decide for themselves. In English and subtitled German. —**BEN SACHS** *91 min. Fri 4/5, 2 and 6:15 PM; Sat 4/6, 4:30 and 8:15 PM; Sun 4/7, 3:15 PM; Mon 4/8, 6 PM; Tue 4/9, 8:30 PM; Wed 4/10, 6 PM; and Thu 4/11, 8:15 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center*

FILM

ALSO PLAYING

N The Best of Enemies

Civil rights activist Ann Atwater (Taraji P. Henson) and KKK leader C.P. Ellis (Sam Rockwell) fight over school integration in 1971 North Carolina in this historical drama. Robin Bissell directed. *PG-13, 133 min. AMC Dine-in Block 37, ArcLight, Century 12 and CineArts 6, Chatham 14, Cicero Showplace 14, Ford City, River East 21, Webster Place 11*

Between the Lines

Joan Micklin Silver (*Hester Street*) directed this 1977 comedy-drama about the professional and personal lives of the staff of an independent Boston newspaper about to be taken over by a larger publication. With John Heard, Lindsay Crouse, and Jeff Goldblum. *101 min. Reader publisher Tracy Baim leads a discussion at the Wednesday screening. Sat 4/6, 3 PM; Mon 4/8, 8 PM; and Wed 4/10, 6 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center*

Body + Camera 2019 Chicago: The Un/Certain Body

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N The Brink

Alison Klayman directed this documentary about former Trump White House chief strategist Steve Bannon. *91 min.*

Chicago Latino Film Festival

The 35th annual Chicago Latino Film Festival concludes with another week of Spanish-language films from South and Central America and Spain, including Rodrigo Triana's comedy *El Reality* (Colombia). *Through Thu 4/11. Full schedule at chicagolatinofilmfest.org. River East 21*

N Combat Obscura

Miles Lagoze directed this documentary comprised of his own footage as a combat photographer in Afghanistan and of others' footage, to provide a look at the daily behind-the-scenes life of Marines. *70 min.*

Dirty Looks LA: Eight Years

A selection of short films and videos (1966-2017) that have shown as part of the Los Angeles-based queer screening series Dirty Looks. Included are works by Warren Sonbert, Brontez Purnell, Michael Robinson, Mariah Garnett, Jill Reiter, and others. *84 min. Dirty Looks' founder/programmer Bradford Nordeen attends the screening. Fri 4/5, 7 PM. Northwestern University Block Museum of Art FREE*

Doc10 Film Festival

The 2019 edition of the Doc10 Film Festival opens on April 11 with Rachel Lears's *Knock Down the House*, about the 2018 Congressional campaigns of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and three other female candidates. Additional films showing include Avi Belkin's *Mike Wallace Is Here*, about the famed newsmen; Cristina Ibarra and Alex Rivera's *The Infiltrators*, about anti-ICE activists; and Penny Lane's *Hail Satan?*, about the Satanic Temple. *Thu 4/11-Sun 4/14. Full schedule at doc10.org. Davis*

Hump! Film Festival

Amateur porn, courtesy of Dan Savage and his annual festival. *Fri 4/5, 7:30 and 10 PM; and Sat 4/6, 7 and 9:30 PM. Music Box*

In Search of Margo-Go

Begun in 1994, this queer punk film about NYC club culture was finally completed by director Jill Reiter in 2015. With Kathleen Hanna. *45 min. Reiter and Bradford Nordeen, founder and programmer of the LA-based queer screening series Dirty Looks, attend the screening. Showing with Reiter's 1993 short films Frenzy and Birthday Party. Sun 4/7, 7:30 PM. Music Box*

N Knife+Heart

Yann Gonzalez directed this French thriller about a series of murders and romantic intrigue on the set of a gay porn production in 1979 Paris. In French and Spanish with subtitles. *110 min. At Music Box Theatre. Visit music-boxtheatre.com for showtimes.*

McQ

John Wayne stars as a Seattle cop battling police corruption and investigating the killing of his partner. John Sturges directed this 1974 drama. *PG, 111 min. Tue 4/9, 7 PM. Univ. of Chicago Doc Films*

Videos by Tabita Razaire

A program of three experimental videos (2016-17) produced in South Africa by the French Guiana-based new media artist. *60 min. Razaire attends the screening. Thu 4/11, 6 PM. Gene Siskel Film Center*

TV on Film 2

The Chicago Film Society programmed this four-hour long evening of television shows, commercials, infomercials, and other broadcast miscellany, all screening as 16mm prints from their own holdings and from private collectors. *Sat 4/6, 6 PM. Chicago Filmmakers*

UIC MFA Thesis Screening

A program of work (2016-19) by MFA students at the University of Illinois-Chicago. Showing with UIC grad Jesse McLean's 2011 experimental video *Remote*. *64 min. Fri 4/5, 7 PM. Nightingale FREE*

Wanderers of the Desert

Nacer Khemir directed this 1984 Tunisian/French film about a teacher in a desert village where there are rumors of a hidden treasure and a curse overhangs the lives of the children. In Arabic with subtitles. *95 min. Wed 4/10, 7 PM. Northwestern University Block Museum of Art FREE*

N We Are Columbine

Laura Farber directed this documentary reflecting on the 1999 mass shooting through the stories and memories of four survivors (Ferber herself is also a survivor of the tragedy). *79 min. Farber attends the screening. Tue 4/9, 7 PM. Music Box*

N The Wind

Emma Tammi directed this supernatural western about a woman living in the remote 19th-century American plains tormented by an unseen force. *86 min. Fri 4/5-Sat 4/6, midnight. Music Box*

N Wrestle

Lauren Belfer and Suzannah Herbert directed this documentary about the on- and off-the-mat experiences of high school wrestlers in Huntsville, Alabama, as they pursue the state championship. *96 min. At Facets Cinémathèque. Visit facets.org for showtimes.* 



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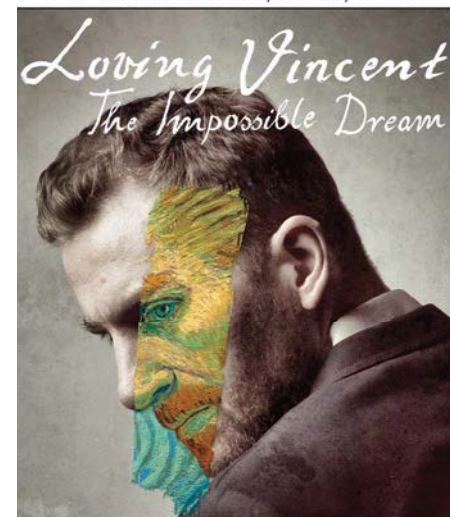
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READER

John Cage's treasures are hiding in plain sight

The influential experimental composer's largest archive lives in a library at Northwestern—and it goes a lot deeper than its famous Beatles lyric sheets.

By JUSTIN CURTO

Greg MacAyeal first encountered John Cage while studying music composition in the late 80s as an undergraduate at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Arguably America's most influential experimental composer, Cage is famous for his 1952 "silent piece" 4'33", and in the 1950s and '60s he'd pushed the envelope musically by composing works incorporating silence, indeterminacy, and electronics. He'd taught and researched at UIUC two decades before, from 1967 until '69, spending most of his time cocreating a mammoth computer-music piece called *HPSCHD* that premiered in May 1969.

Cage's music didn't leave the university when he did, of course. In 1987, UIUC composition professor William Brooks, who'd participated in the *HPSCHD* premiere, staged a performance of Cage's 1976 piece *Lecture on the Weather*, which incorporates words and drawings by Henry David Thoreau and was inspired in part by haiku form. A composer as playful as he was profound, Cage had stipulated that the piece be performed by 12 "preferably American men who have become Canadian citizens," but Brooks just needed willing musicians. So he got MacAyeal involved to read excerpts from texts such as *Walden* and "Civil Disobedience," chosen through chance operations.

Thus MacAyeal's fascination with Cage began. "It's hard to get away from Cage, as a composer or anybody that's interested in new music since 1945," he says. "Whether you agree with him or not, you can't not respond to him in one way or another."

MacAyeal certainly hasn't gotten away from Cage. Since 2015 he's served as curator of Northwestern University's music library, and as part of the job he manages the university's John Cage Collection, which the composer established with an initial gift in 1976 and added to repeatedly until his death in 1992. "I was going through a poster collection, and I found a poster for the concert I performed in," Mac-

From left to right: three of Cage's letters, written to Yoko Ono (with Cage's partner Merce Cunningham) the day after John Lennon's murder, to a high school student who'd asked him about his famous piece 4'33", and to Northwestern music librarian Don L. Roberts to prepare for a 1974 campus visit.

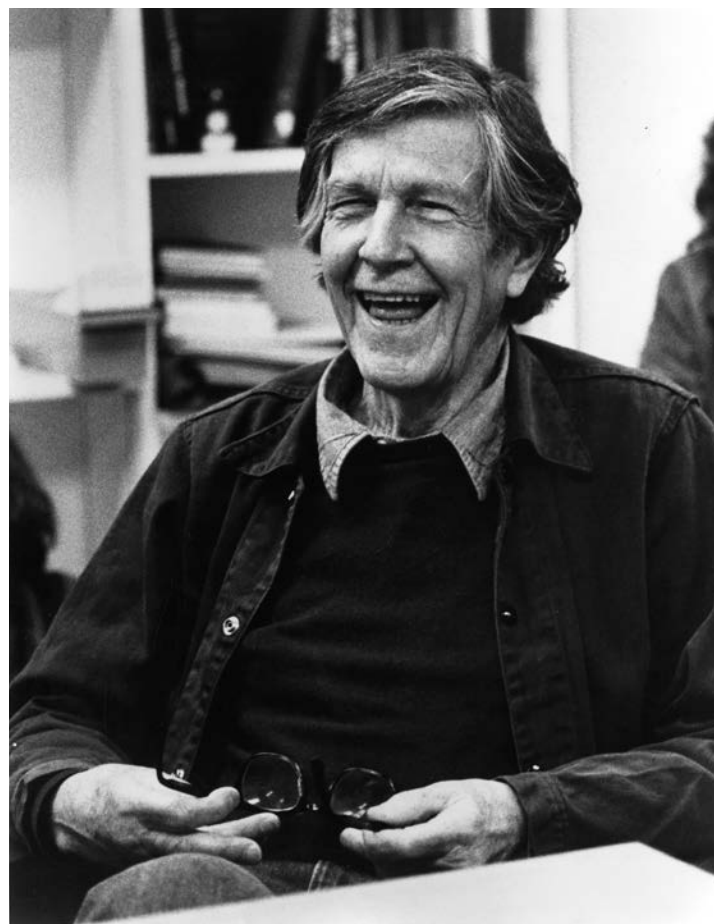
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Ayeal says. "It was really weird to encounter myself in this archival collection. Like, 'Oh, that's it, that's the concert in October of '87.'"

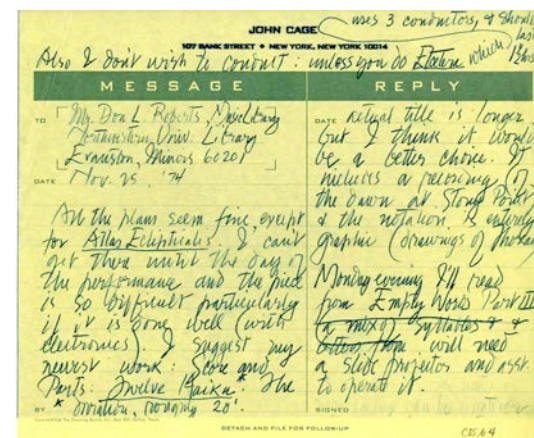
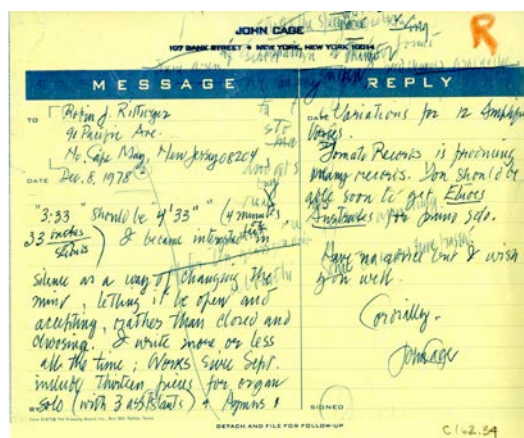
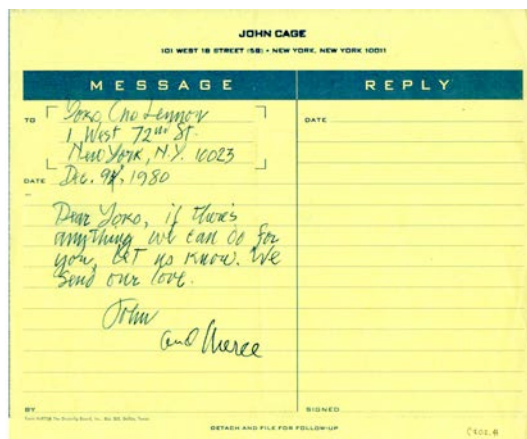
Wesleyan University holds documents related to most of Cage's books, the New York Public Library holds most of Cage's music manuscripts, and the University of California, Santa Cruz, holds Cage's materials related to mycology (the study of fungi). But the collection at Northwestern is the largest single concentration of Cage materials anywhere in the world—it not only surveys modern musical composition during the 1960s but also hu-

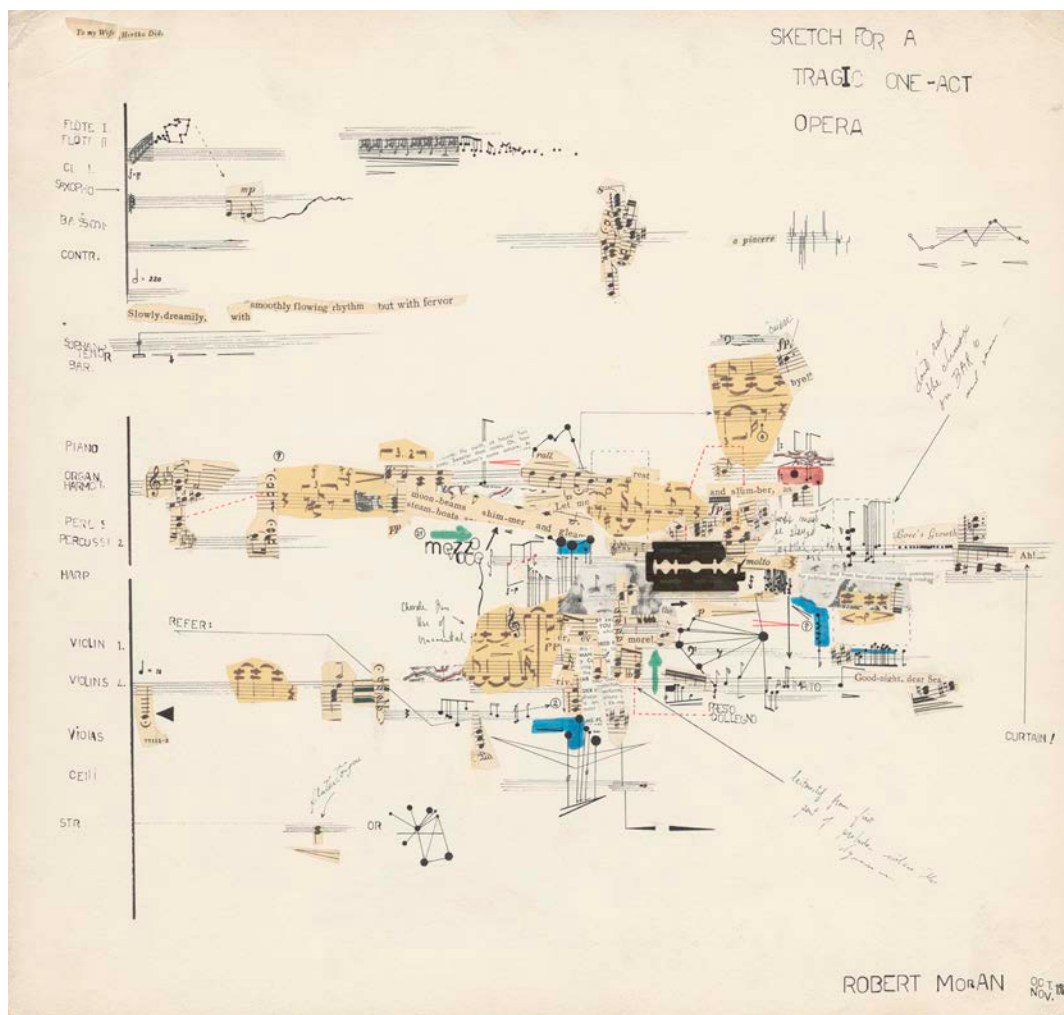
manizes a composer who continues to divide scholars with his challenges to the definition of music.

That said, not many Chicagoans know this archive exists—and if they do, they've probably heard of it only because of its Beatles lyric sheets, which have been a perennial magnet for local media coverage. The John Cage Collection isn't housed in a tourist destination like a museum, and in fact it's a couple miles outside Chicago. Very little of it is on public view. Primarily a research destination for academics, the collection is kept in hundreds of



John Cage in 1987 © SUSAN SCHWARTZENBERG/THE EXPLORATORIUM





Robert Moran created *Sketch for a Tragic One-Act Opera* specifically for John Cage's *Notations* book project. Its nontraditional score includes a razor blade taped to the page.
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materials from throughout Cage's life (not just those he received but also those he sent, thanks to the carbon-copy Note-o-Grams he wrote on), with the exception of letters related to acquiring the scores for *Notations*. The archive also contains unprocessed ephemera, such as nine scrapbooks documenting Cage's childhood and early tours.

In 1973 Cage wrote to Don L. Roberts, then Northwestern's music librarian, because he was interested in "the problem of where to go to study manuscripts of contemporary music" and he wanted his own materials to be "safer and better kept." At the time, few institutions took "new music" seriously, but Roberts had begun amassing one of the largest academic collections of it (it may even have been the only such collection in 1973). Today, Northwestern's music library is a hub for scholarly research into Cage as well as into experimental performance more broadly. The library's influence reverberates throughout the university's Bienen School of Music, which contains the Institute for New Music and offers courses on experimental and new music.

D.J. Hoek, currently Northwestern's associate university librarian for research and engagement, ran the music library (and thus the John Cage Collection) from 2004 till 2015,

taking over after Roberts retired. During his tenure, students and faculty cited the presence of the Cage Collection in calling for the school to increase its commitment to new music, and in 2012 this led to the establishment of the Institute for New Music. "I don't mean to say that if not for the library none of this stuff would've happened," Hoek says, "but I know that because of the library it sure helped."

In 2013 Northwestern hired Ryan Dohoney, an assistant musicology professor who teaches on Cage, his New York School collaborators, and experimentalism in music at large. (Full disclosure: I'm a junior at NU, and I've taken two of Dohoney's classes. He also advised a grant-funded research project of mine last summer.) One of his courses focuses specifically on Cage, his relationships with collaborators, and performances of his works—it draws from materials in the collection, and according to Dohoney the music library's staff has been integral to making it happen. "They're so open to me having people dig through it—students who don't know anything about a) archival research or b) John Cage," he says. "It's this way to orient them to real research with some of the most rewarding materials of 20th-century music."

The best-known materials in the Cage Collection—framed copies hang in the music library on public view—are lyric sheets from the Beatles. Yoko Ono, a friend of Cage's, wanted to introduce him to the work of the Beatles, who shared his interest in silence, chance, and tape music. For the *Notations* book, she got him "scores" for seven of their songs—the Beatles didn't write notated music, something Ono had to explain to Cage in a letter, so the scores were simply lyrics. John Lennon gave her six manuscripts from *Revolver*, including "Eleanor Rigby" and "Yellow Submarine," and Ono later convinced Paul McCartney to give her the colorful manuscript for "The Word" (from *Rubber Soul*). Cage included a black-and-white scan of "The Word" in *Notations*, the book's only piece of pop music by any standard.

Hoek, who's researched the lyric sheets, presents them to visiting alumni and community organizations to demonstrate the value in keeping manuscripts. "It's trying to get as close as we can to that moment where somebody has an idea and they pick up a pen or a pencil and they take a shot at writing it down," he says.

Pierre Boulez, a favorite correspondence partner for Cage, sent him the manuscript →



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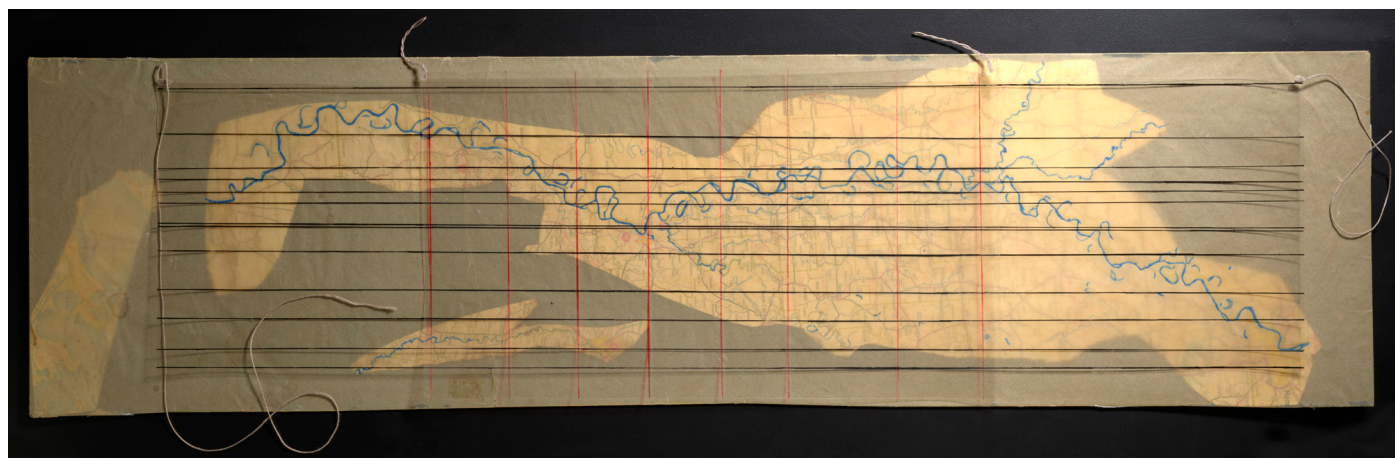
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continued from 25

for the landmark *Second Piano Sonata*, a behemoth solo piece that the French serialist composer wrote in 1947 and '48. The collection contains Boulez's notes for the piece, a draft with whole measures crossed out and notes moved, the "fair copy" (which is sent to the publisher) for the second and third movements covered by instructions in Boulez's tiny handwriting, and the eventual published version.

It's one of MacAyeal's favorites in the Cage Collection. "Within this one folder, you've got this entire genesis of this work—just this hugely important work," he says.

The Notations Project Collection includes scores to many other compositions revered as technical achievements, such as Steve Reich's 1967 *Piano Phase*, his first major piece for live instruments that employs the technique of "phasing"—two pianists play a simple, rapid figure in sync, and then one speeds up slightly, causing them to slip out of alignment and eventually back into a new one. Cage's close contemporary Morton Feldman sent in 1964's *The King of Denmark*, his first graphic score. And Cage's own contribution, the 1951 piano piece *Music of Changes*, was one of the first



Philip Corner's 1954 piece *Mississippi River South of Memphis*, also part of John Cage's *Notations* project, asks performers to "read" a traced map of the titular river as though it were sheet music. Horizontal lines indicate pitch; vertical lines, time. © PRINTED BY PERMISSION OF THE COMPOSER

to employ indeterminate methods in its composition—his original copy rests in a book-shaped box, black on the top and bottom and red on the sides, with each page separately laminated.

All these pieces, no matter how experimental, retain some connection to traditional ideas of how notated music looks—even Feldman's abstract graphic score is read like sheet music, in bars from left to right, with some

indications of time and pitch. Yet many other works in *Notations* challenge those conventions, to put it mildly. The "score" for the piece *Danger Musik for Dick Higgins*, by Fluxus artist Nam June Paik, consists entirely of a single handwritten sheet instructing the performer to "Creep into the VAGINA of a living WHALE."

Robert Moran, known for his operas, made the collaged *Sketch for a Tragic One-Act Opera* in 1965 specifically for *Notations*. Its single large square of cardstock is scattered with irregular cutouts from magazine articles and sheet music, the largest group clustered around a taped-down Gillette razor blade. Though it shares the general layout of a conductor's score—the various instruments called for are listed in a loose column down the left side of the page—there are no clear divisions between parts. "Nothing I can say about the work other than it was created just for John's collection," Moran confirms in an e-mail.

Falling somewhere between the contributions from Boulez, Paik, and Moran is *Mississippi River South of Memphis*, a 1954 ensemble piece by Fluxus artist and composer Philip Corner. The piece's score consists of a traced map of the southern portion of the Mississippi River, which the performers orient horizontally and overlay with two transparent sheets, one marked with horizontal lines and the other with vertical; two of the lines should intersect at a particular place on the map, such as the performance site. The horizontal lines indicate pitch; the vertical, time. Performers play along the river from left to right, "moving over even flow," according to Corner's instructions. He encourages individual performers to "go on to tributaries, to follow parallel currents or a jump to an ox-bow lake."

"It's probably the most remarkable example of graphic notation," Hoek says. "Maybe my favorite ever."

In contrast to the *Notations* side of the collection, which brims with the sort of puckish musical unorthodoxy that Cage found fascinating, the Correspondence Collection more fully expresses the composer's ordinary, relatable humanity. As MacAyeal says, he was "a man who had likes and dislikes and friendships and felt pain and felt joy and had setbacks and successes."

The letter Cage and his partner, choreographer Merce Cunningham, sent to Yoko Ono after John Lennon's murder conveys deep emotion in just two sentences: "Dear Yoko, if there's anything we can do for you, let us know. We send our love." It struck Hoek from the first time he saw it. "When we were processing that collection, I came across that and I'm like, whoa," he says. "It's a really powerful, emblematic example of how these letters, they capture a moment."

Cage wrote to many well-known figures, including Ono, Boulez, architect Buckminster Fuller, and philosopher Marshall McLuhan. But he also kept the letters he sent to everyday people, such as the student who wrote to ask about "3:33." Cage's reply doesn't stop with correcting her about the name of the piece ("4 minutes or feet, 33 inches or seconds") but goes on to distill his intentions in composing it. "I became interested in silence as a way of changing the mind, letting it be more open and accepting, rather than closed and choosing," he writes.

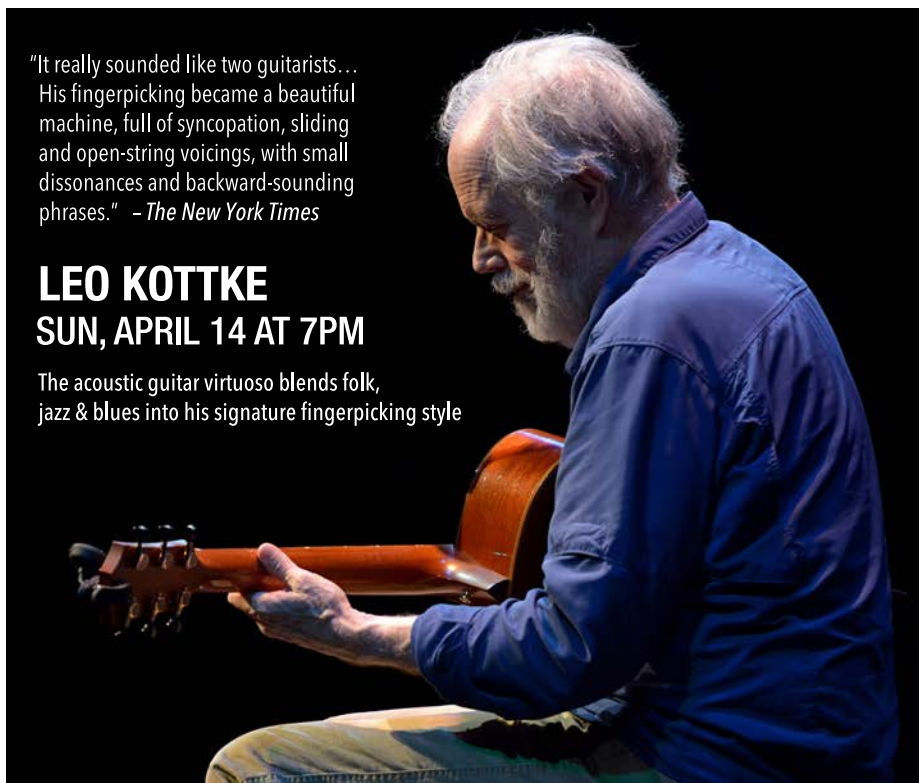
To MacAyeal, this simple, lucid explanation enriches our understanding of an enigmatic piece. "For all the things that people have said and all the weird things that he's said about 4'33", that one letter is the most brilliant, explanatory thing I've read about it," he says. "And he just wrote it as a reply to this high school kid in the mid-70s who probably didn't even know who he was."

Correspondence such as this can open ➔

"It really sounded like two guitarists... His fingerpicking became a beautiful machine, full of syncopation, sliding and open-string voicings, with small dissonances and backward-sounding phrases." — *The New York Times*

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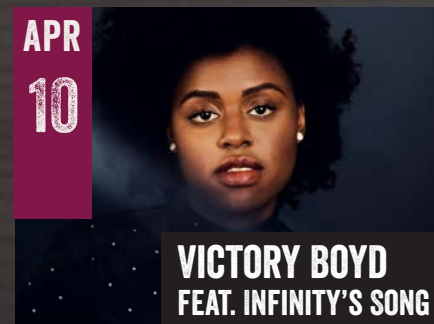
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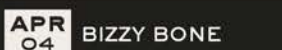
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BOW & HAMMER



APR 21

BIG FREEDIA



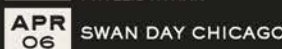
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up broader research possibilities than the scores and manuscripts from *Notations*, which tend to encourage relatively straightforward analysis of a piece's composition or development. Hoek and MacAyeal have worked with many scholars from disciplines outside music, studying a wide range of interconnected subjects: Cage's friendships with artists, dance performances of his works, his relationship with technology.

John Green, a PhD candidate in musicology at the University of Rochester, knows something about the possibilities the collection contains. His dissertation research focuses on four of Cage's broadcast pieces, three of which—his music for Kenneth Patchen's 1942 American radio play *The City Wears a Slouch Hat*, the 1979 West German radio performance *Roaratorio*, and his performance in Nam June Paik's 1984 international satellite-TV simulcast *Good Morning, Mr. Orwell*—figure extensively in the Correspondence Collection. Green won Northwestern's \$3,000 John Cage Research Grant in 2017, which funded a visit to the collection. He found letters from listeners responding to *Slouch Hat*, Cage's letters requesting sound recordings for *Roaratorio*, and letters between Cage and Paik planning for *Mr. Orwell*.

"They're really correspondence-based because broadcast, that my dissertation focuses on, is a collaborative kind of effort," Green says. "It's usually something that you can trace in the documents in the archives there." When he couldn't find correspondence in the collection on the fourth subject of his research, Cage's 1959 performance of *Water Walk* on Italian TV, he had to adopt a more subjective approach. "That's my interpretation, whereas these other chapters, I'm almost like an ethnographer—I'm almost like following the lead of the evidence," he explains.

Dohoney has also used the collection for his own research, specifically on Morton Feldman's 1971 composition for the Rothko Chapel in Houston. In his forthcoming book, *Saving Abstraction*, a 1966 letter from Feldman to Cage illuminates Feldman's dismal financial condition before arts patrons John and Dominique de Menil commissioned him to write a piece for the chapel they'd founded. No copy of the letter exists in Feldman's own archive at the Paul Sacher Foundation in Switzerland.

Dohoney sees this approach—using Cage's archive to research someone else entirely—as potentially representing a turning point in "Cage studies."

"We kind of know everything we need to know about Cage, more or less," he says of his

fellow researchers. "I like to think of them as people using archives against themselves—that we're using these archives not to lionize the person whose collection it is, but to use it to recover other traces."

The library at Northwestern has helped that happen by acquiring separate archives by performers and artists adjacent to Cage, in hopes that they can work in conversation. A collection from musician, performance artist, and avant-garde festival organizer Charlotte Moorman (who became notorious as "the topless cellist" after a midperformance arrest for indecent exposure in 1967) served as the basis for the 2016 exhibition "A Feast of Astonishments" at Northwestern's Block Museum of Art. Other collections include correspondence from Fluxus artist Dick Higgins, founder of Something Else Press, and from Something Else editor Jan Herman; the library also has unprocessed archives from several experimental composers, which have yet to be catalogued and thus aren't publicly accessible.

Scott Krafft, who manages much of this material as curator of Northwestern's special collections, says building such a network of archives aids researchers who might be able to draw from many at one time. "I think it just makes sense," he says. "It gives our library a bit of individuality and cachet to have these strong, what you'd call 'destination collections.'"

When Northwestern was beginning to develop its archive of 20th-century avant-garde music, Cage engaged with the university in more ways than donating his materials. He visited the university twice during Roberts's tenure as music librarian: once in 1975 for a talk and performance and once in 1992, shortly before his death, for a scholarly celebration of his 80th birthday. Northwestern held a similar celebration in 2012 for Cage's centennial. MacAyeal worked on the accompanying exhibition, "Sound & Silence," and interviewed Brooks, the professor who'd introduced him to Cage 25 years earlier. During their conversation, MacAyeal asked a long-standing question: "What makes Cage relevant today?"

Brooks replied that Cage asks questions about control—having it, lacking it, responding to it—that remain consequential.

"That's a very abstracted way of thinking about some aspects of Cage, but I think he's right in the point he's making that that question is never going to be irrelevant to anybody," MacAyeal says. "He'll always remain important, he'll always remain relevant, and we've got this gigantic collection of stuff that people need to use." **A**

A Reader staffer shares three musical obsessions, then asks someone (who asks someone else) to take a turn.



In the real world, alas, folks at Moo & Oink generally didn't do so much dancing.

SALEM COLLO-JULIN

Reader music listings coordinator

Minutemen, "Acoustic Blow-Out" Sometimes you listen to a CD so much it cracks in half in the player—RIP my first copy of Minutemen's *Double Nickels on the Dime*. D. Boon, a member of the fatal "27 club," packed in a lot of life before the car crash that took his life, and supposedly this "Acoustic Blow-Out" was made for Los Angeles public access cable in 1985, only months before he died. I have no idea why they're all sitting on the floor, or why George Hurley is playing bongos.

DJ Dame Luz at NYC's Nola Darling in 2016 Philly-based DJ Dame Luz rarely spins here, but thankfully she recorded this stellar hour-long live set. It's undergirded by a relentless, soldiers-getting-ready soca beat and at one point topped with Gregorian chant, steel drums, and all kinds of dark electronic arts. She also deconstructs the Tropkillaz single "Desabafo" (itself a reworking of 1973's "Deixa eu Dizer" by Brazilian singer Claudia), with sped-up vocals imploring us in Portuguese to "Let me, let me, let me / Tell you what I think about life / I really need to get this out."

The best Moo & Oink commercial ever I cherish my memories of driving to Moo & Oink with my grandparents to pick up slabs of meat. By the time this TV spot started its seemingly endless local run in the 80s, I was too old to believe that people would be dancing in the aisles and waving for catfish, but a girl can dream. The music is by legendary Chicago DJ Richard Pegue (with lyrics by Moo & Oink employee-poet Lillian Bassett). The stores are no more, but we still have this.

LATHAM ZEARFOSS Visual and sonic artist, cofounder of Chances Dances

Xina Xurner merch This LA-via-Chicago queer punk-techno band has the most amaz-

ing merch. Most recently, they sold out of an awesome embroidered hat (designed by front person Young Joon Kwak) before it even officially went on sale. Drool. I also recently got a Roland VT-4 voice manipulator. If I could only get that hat and/or Xina Xurner's Edie Fake-designed T-shirt (also sold out), I could put on my XX gear, a nasty wig, and wail into my VT-4, mimicking the band's signature banshee-goddess wails. Full fantasy!

Leaving Neverland When Michael Jackson died, I was convinced it would be OK to love him uncomplicatedly from that point forward. This brutal, clarifying, and deeply empathetic 2019 documentary gave me the opportunity to address my own complicity with rape culture and the dehumanization-via-deification that we visit upon celebrities. The two survivors and the filmmaker have given us a real gift. Rarely are we afforded such a gracious opportunity to fully understand the effects of looking the other way. If you are or ever were an MJ fan, this is required viewing.

Solange Knowles, *When I Get Home* This is one of those albums that will age incredibly well, even if it's left some folks underwhelmed now. Sure, *When I Get Home* doesn't have the magnificent melancholy of *A Seat at the Table*, but Solange's latest is a loosely conceptual attempt to decenter her own voice—a revolutionary proposition for pop royalty. The result is a bleep-blooming river of joining and disjointed voices, of shifting subjectivity.



Solange Knowles released *When I Get Home* last month.

IN ROTATION



Yoko Ono's 1973 double album *Approximately Infinite Universe*

JEN DELOS REYES Artist, educator, performs with Latham in Glist!

Yoko Ono, "What a Mess" What do you hear when you become open to the messages the universe is sending you? This week, when I played my freshly auto-updated Favorites Mix, the first song was "What a Mess" from Yoko Ono's 1973 double album *Approximately Infinite Universe*. It's an upbeat, pleasure-filled rant on fighting for social justice and equity while under the powerful forces of systemic oppression. Each verse touches on these challenges, followed by the three laments: What a waste. What a drag. What a mess.

Stevie Nicks, "Outside the Rain" The emotional exhaustion of "What a Mess" carries over perfectly into the moody exasperation of "Outside the Rain," which came up next on my playlist. The tone shifts from collective struggle to the intimate battles of partnerships. This frustrated ballad moves through the pain of being with an undedicated partner, as Nicks sings, "I am tired of trying." In the soft ether of Stevie's world, you hear background vocals repeat the words that we hope follow all nightmares: "It's only a dream."

The Smiths, "Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now" The playlist then breaks into the Smiths' ode to drudgery and disillusionment. This song is a reminder that we often have more agency than we think—we don't have to commit our time and lives to people or work that cause us to suffer. An alternate title for this Favorites Mix could easily be "Let Go and Move On." I can't wait to hear what messages I receive in next week's personal algorithm-fueled playlist.

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PICK OF THE WEEK

Futuristic J-pop trio Perfume breathe fresh air into the U.S. tour circuit



COURTESY THE ARTIST

PERFUME

Fri 4/5, 8 PM, Chicago Theatre, 175 N. State, \$49.50-\$98.50. ALL

PERFUME HAVE BEEN at the top of the Japanese pop scene for more than a decade, so it's easy to forget that the trio, which formed in Hiroshima in 2000, had been on the verge of quitting after a number of their mid-aughts singles didn't perform up to the expectations of their record label. But in 2007, they caught a lucky break when they were selected by Japan's public broadcasting network (NHK) to perform in a high-profile public service announcement for a national recycling campaign. The song from that PSA, "Polyrhythm," is a catchy but stunningly complicated synth-pop jam that took the group from regional favorites to national icons. And a year after "Polyrhythm" was featured in the *Cars 2* soundtrack in 2011, Perfume began kick-starting efforts to appeal to international audiences as well. Since then, they've had numerous number one hits in Japan, toured around the world, branded their own clothing, and (of course) released a line of fragrances. This spring they're touring the States, and the dates include an appearance at Coachella—they'll be the first J-pop band to ever perform at the west-coast festival. Perfume's futuristic

aesthetic and tendency toward pop experimentation are both partly due to their long-term producer and composer, Yasutaka Nakata. The intense synchronicity of this collaboration has been one of the reasons they've excelled above their peers. When *Forbes* asked Perfume's Kashiyuka what she meant by describing a song as "very Perfume," she explained what she sees as the essence of the Perfume aesthetic: "Persistence. Synchronization. It might look mechanical, but there's a sense of human warmth in what we do." That's also a canny appraisal of their appeal: Perfume are known for their heavily processed vocals and inhumanly precise choreography, but the trio excel at finding small moments to express their humanity, such as the slight and subtle variations each member brings to their dancing. The U.S. venues they've booked are smaller than the arenas they're known to play in Japan and elsewhere, so it will be interesting to see how they adapt their notoriously cutting-edge performances, which include elaborate backgrounds and moving platforms. Regardless, this is a rare chance to see one of pop's most consistently thrilling live acts. —ED BLAIR

THURSDAY4

ADRIAN BELEW 8 PM, *Old Town School of Folk Music*, 4544 N. Lincoln, sold out. ALL

When it comes to conversations about the best guitar players of all time, rock fans typically mention the likes of Jimmy Page and Jimi Hendrix long before the thought of little old Adrian Belew crosses their minds. That's a shame, because the unassuming shredder has one of the most mind-bending discographies in music history. Belew shared the stage and studio with icons such as Frank Zappa, David Bowie, and the Talking Heads, frying minds with his next-level alien dexterity—and that was all before he joined up with Robert Fripp in 1980 to front newly re-formed progressive-rock pioneers King Crimson. Belew-era Crimson produced some of the most frantic, boundary-pushing rock music the world has ever seen; the nine albums they released showcase Belew and Fripp's complicated rhythms and crystalline guitar interplay, which provide a foundation for Belew's idiosyncratic vocals. This legacy alone would be enough to satisfy the hungriest prog-head, but it really only scratches the surface of Belew's credits, which also include contributions to albums by Nine Inch Nails, Paul Simon, and Mike Oldfield. On top of all of this are his 20 solo LPs, including the brand-new *Pop-Sided*, which features his signature wide-eyed take on shred-pop. Live, Belew pulls from all eras of his career with a heavy emphasis on his untouchable Crimson run. —LUCA CIMARUSTI

HAND HABITS See also *Friday. Tomberlin and Gia Margaret* open. 9 PM, *Hideout*, 1354 W. Wabansia, \$12, sold out. 21+

Singer-songwriter Meg Duffy started the intimate Hand Habits project in their native upstate New York in the early 2010s, but largely put the project on pause after moving to Los Angeles and linking up with Kevin Morby as a session and touring guitarist. Taking a break seemed to serve Duffy well, or at least help them get to a place where they could emerge with an indie-rock album as tender and taut as March's *Placeholder* (Saddle Creek). Duffy recently told NPR that relationships play a key role in their worldview and songwriting, and that comes across clearly throughout the album. On the single "Can't Calm Down," Duffy reflects on their roots with melancholy and a defined ache, as they sing about their concerns of not living up to familial heroes; Duffy offers no concrete answers, but suggests deep thinking brings the first steps toward clarity. —LEOR GALIL

MDOU MOCTAR *TALsounds and DJ Matt Jencik* open. 8:30 PM, *Empty Bottle*, 1035 N. Western, \$18. 21+

The story of Mdou Moctar's early years reads like show-business boilerplate. Growing up in a conservative rural town in central Niger, he had neither money nor parental permission to buy a guitar, so he scavenged items such as bits of wood and bicycle brake cables until he had enough parts to build his own. Moctar had to leave town to make his

Kemba

LOGAN POE



debut recording, and though it didn't even get a proper release, the Auto-Tune-soaked song "Tahoul-tine" became a regional hit as people across the Sahel swapped it from cell phone to cell phone. That's how Christopher Kirkley, the American proprietor of the U.S.-based Sahel Sounds label, first heard his music. Nowadays Moctar tours the world and has several albums under his belt—five of them on Sahel Sounds—and he isn't playing brake cables or computerized effects anymore. Every one of his records is different from the last, and the newest, *Ilana: The Creator*, elaborates upon the incendiary live sound that Moctar has brought to international stages over the past couple years. It was recorded in Detroit last year with Moctar's touring band, which includes drummer Souleymane Ibrahim, bassist Mikey Coltun, and rhythm guitarist Ahmoudou Madassane (a recording artist in his own right, whose soundtrack for the movie *Zerzura* sounds like a Tuareg riposte to Neil Young's work on *Dead Man*). Their grooves drive Moctar's dry, earnest singing at a clip that leaves the earlier generation of African desert guitarists, such as Ali Farka Touré and the members of Tinariwen, in the dust—and Moctar himself has turned into an unabashed shredder of a lead guitarist. —BILL MEYER

NICK MASON'S SAUCERFUL OF SECRETS
7:30 PM, Chicago Theatre, 175 N. State, \$39.50-\$157.50.

If you're a fan of Pink Floyd's most iconic albums, such as *Animals* and *The Wall*, you may have plunked down some cash to see Roger Waters in his solo show or caught David Gilmour the last time he was in town. But if you've got an appetite for Floyd's early trippy material, drummer Nick Mason

(aka "the heartbeat of Pink Floyd") might be more your cup of tea. He's currently touring as the leader of a quintet billed as Nick Mason's Saucerful of Secrets, which includes Spandau Ballet guitarist Gary Kemp, longtime Pink Floyd touring bassist Guy Pratt, guitarist Lee Harris, and keyboardist Dom Beken. Mason, who cofounded Pink Floyd with Waters, keyboardist Richard Wright, and guitarist Syd Barrett in 1965, shaped the group with his jazz and big-band influences and remained a constant from their prog-rock beginnings through their mainstream success (with some lineup changes) in the 80s and beyond. He also cowrote some of the band's best-known songs, such as "Time," from 1973's *Dark Side of the Moon*. But though he released music without his Pink Floyd bandmates, including a handful of collaborative projects and a solo outing called *Nick Mason's Fictitious Sports* in 1981, Mason had never toured without Pink Floyd until last year. (In fact, outside of a Floyd reunion set at London's Live 8 concert in 2005, Mason spent about 25 years playing out only sporadically while pursuing passions such as piloting helicopters and racing sports cars.) Unlike Waters and Gilmour, who tend to stick to post-*Dark Side of the Moon* material in their solo shows, Saucerful of Secrets focuses on Floyd material from 1967 to 1972—some of which Mason hadn't played live in 40 years when he started the band. This means he's dishing up ditties from albums such as *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn* and *Obscured by Clouds*, as well as—you guessed it—*A Saucerful of Secrets*. The set list spotlights Mason's drum work and allows him to finally bang the gong on "Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun"—a bit of theatricality that Waters used to perform in live shows. Though the light show remains, the quintet has eschewed the stadium-size venues and over-the-top spectacle that marked Floyd ➔

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concerts (translation: don't expect any flying pigs) in favor of relatively intimate settings. Hard-core fans may wonder whether Mason can still hit the skins at age 75, but the reviews have been stellar since the tour kicked off last September, so anyone who can nab some tickets should leave feeling satisfied.

—KIRSTEN LAMBERT

FRIDAY 5

HAND HABITS See Thursday, 9 PM, Hideout, 1354 W. Wabansia, sold out, \$12. 21+

PERFUME See *Pick of the Week*, page 30. 8 PM, Chicago Theatre, 175 N. State, \$49.50-\$98.50. 18

SATURDAY 6

KEMBA Brittney Carter, Calid B., DJ RTC, and DJ Cash Era open. 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle, 1035 N. Western, \$10. 21+

Bronx rapper Kemba opens his self-released 2016 album, *Negus*, with a plea: "Don't call it political / Please don't deem this lyrical / These are negro spirituals." Kemba, who'd previously recorded and performed under the name YC the Cynic, understands how easily his patient, contemplative songs

can be pigeonholed as "conscious hip-hop," but anyone who'd expect him to regurgitate east-coast boom-bap and a selection of preapproved lyrical subjects would miss the full power of his music. Since *Negus*, he's released just a few singles, including this year's raw, striking "Deadass," which merges jazz and funk via a limber upright-bass melody. With his confident, dry delivery, Kemba negotiates riotous energy and restrained focus, emerging with a performance that transcends any defined subgenre.

—LEOR GALIL

GODDAMN GALLOWS Scott H. Biram, Urban Pioneers, and Lara Hope & the Ark-Tones open. 7 PM, Reggies, 2109 S. State, \$15. 17+

Born in Michigan and raised on the road, the Goddamn Gallows had a four-year gap between *The Maker* and last year's *The Trial*. The somewhat nomadic existence of this raw and boisterous band might account for that—they've moved from Michigan to Portland to California, and their members are currently scattered in cities all over the country (including Chicago) like empty bottles. But whatever the reason for the delay, *The Trial* was worth the wait. The album showcases the group's melodic sensibility and road-honed tightness, herding their and elaborate instrumentation—banjos, fiddles, mandolins, and accordions share time with raw distorted guitars and growling metal vocals—into a glorious attack formation. The Goddamn Gallows' style has been described as "hobocore," and they draw from diverse influences—Americana, bluegrass, punk, metal, cabaret, Celtic punk, sea shanties, and more—to create a sound that's both new and nostalgically familiar. The overall vibe is like an eternal hangover, like a pint swung in cheer so hard somebody near the drinker loses teeth, or like a murder story in which the victim sees death coming (and is royally pissed off about it). Live, the Goddamn Gallows spark an energy that blurs the line between clogging circles and mosh pits, and on this tour, they coheadline with rootsy one-man band Scott H. Biram—a kindred spirit if ever there was one. Biram's latest album, 2017's *The Bad Testament* (Bloodshot), is a masterpiece of heavy honky-tonkin' and battle blues. —MONICA KENDRICK

AVEY TARE 7 PM, Co-Prosperity Sphere, 3219 S. Morgan, sold out. 18

Visual art and multimedia—album covers, music videos, merch designs, stage productions—are a big part of Animal Collective's distinct flavor, so it makes sense that for his new solo album, *Cows on Hourglass Pond*, core member Avey Tare (the pseudonym of David Michael Portner) would incorporate some extramusical creative flourishes. By the album's release on March 22, he'd already released two contrasting videos, the audio-only single "Taken Boy," and a short story in both text and audio forms—in the latter the words are enhanced with multiple effects, including dripping slapback delay over sprawling, airy loop-based soundscapes. These pieces enrich the intricate world that Animal Collective and its offshoots have created, which has foundations in immersive multisensory experiences and nostalgia—and in the idea that childlike won-

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MUSIC



Ex Hex  MICHAEL LAVINE

der and playfulness can be had at any age. Cows on Hourglass Pond embodies these themes particularly well—not by grasping at the past, but by accepting that time moves forward and evolving with it. Tare seems to indicate his own maturation through his vocal delivery—he’s mostly stepped away from his characteristic puppylike spryness to adopt a more mellow approach. Musically, the album is similar to early and middle Animal Collective, but like Tare’s voice, the mood is calm and settled while retaining its vigor and sense of exploration. Though it seems intensely personal and cloaked with enigmatic allure, it’s also blissful and inviting. The music videos, directed by Tare’s sister, Abigail Portner, complement the songs with colorful, sporadically changing abstract animation in “Saturdays (Again)” and tastefully manipulated footage of a horse in “HORS_.” On tour, Tare will perform his solo music with fellow Animal Collective member Deakin and Jeremy Hyman of Avey Tare’s Slasher Flicks. Portner provided live visuals for Tare’s tour supporting his 2017 album, *Eucalyptus*, so a multimedia show that builds upon the aesthetics of Cows on Hourglass Pond seems like a possibility. At the very least, audiences can expect evocative renditions of this new material. —**IZZY YELLEN**

WEDNESDAY10

TOMMY CARROLL'S CALCULATED DISCOMFORT 9 PM, the Whistler, 2421 N. Milwaukee. 21+ **FREE**

Chicago drummer Tommy Carroll first came to prominence as a skateboarder in the late aughts.

Blind since he was two years old, he picked up the sport in third grade, and by age 15 his skills and dedication had caught the attention of Tony Hawk, who traveled to Glenview in 2008 to skate with him. But in a 2013 interview with *McSweeney's*, Carroll briefly noted his interest in drumming and jazz, and since then, public interest has focused more on his music than his skating. Carroll backs and collaborates with a handful of locals, including singer-songwriter Sophie Rae, and drums in at least a couple bands, including jazz outfit Boomerang and soul-rap group Me'chelle & the Crystal Stones. He plays fast and loose with genre when making music under his own name; on “6 Mice,” off his wild 2017 full-length, *Not Amazing*, he stacks a serene horn melody atop a severe drum-and-bass loop. Following August’s *Calculated Discomfort*, the result of a two-day improvisation with more than a dozen collaborators, he takes a more straightforward path toward pop on his new EP, *Listening*, on which he composed all the music and provides drums, percussion, and programming. The luxuriant vocals from Ogi Ifediora and gospel keys from Julius Tucker that open the single “CPR” feel as immediate and vital as any current soul-influenced single. —**LEOR GALIL**

EX HEX *Moaning* opens. 8 PM, Thalia Hall, 1807 S. Allport, \$20. 17+

On Ex Hex’s 2014 debut, *Rips*, guitarist-vocalist Mary Timony of D.C. postpunk royalty Helium and Autoclave went pop in a new trio. On the brand-new *It's Real* (Merge), Timony and company rein it in and slow it down. The first album’s power pop was rooted in a frantic, nervous vibe and proved the band geniuses at cramming earworm ➔

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Tennyson  WARREN KATZ

continued from 35
vocal melodies and white-hot guitar licks into brief explosions of energy. But the greatness of *It's Real* comes from a nearly opposite angle; its songs smolder and steam, its hooks ooze, and its guitars yearn. The band's new pacing gives the tracks a dramatic, glammy edge, and the brilliant "Tough Enough," the shimmering, tough-but-sensitive opening track on *It's Real*, would feel right at home on Cheap Trick's 1977 masterpiece *In Color*. *Rips* was my favorite album of 2014, and that slab of pop perfection is still a regular in my rotation. With *It's Real*, Ex Hex have brought me that same joy all over again. —**LUCA CIMARUSTI**

TENNYSON *Sports Boyfriend* opens. 7:30 PM, Schubas, 3159 N. Southport, \$20. 

Five years ago, Canadian brother-sister duo Tennyson were often seen as a prodigy act. Keyboardist and producer Luke Pretty was 17 when the group began to tour and record; drummer Tess Pretty

was only 15. Now that they're 22 and 20, respectively, their performance is less of a novelty, but they retain the same charm. The Prettys started playing acoustic jazz gigs when they were barely in their teens, and these days they make polished electronica fusion with a smoothness you'd expect from people who've been working together for most of their lives. Tennyson's latest self-released EP, this year's *Different Water*, is more of what the band's fans have come to expect: memorable melodies and busy, layered beats, with touches of their jazz background sliding in and out of their compositions. The title track features a bubbling, mellow soundscape, with a Coltrane-inspired sax solo squonking in for a cameo. "Wintersleep" features the duo's rarely heard singing, with Luke on lead vocals and Tess on mixed-down harmonies, and together their voices provide a nicely wavering contrast to the music's sheen. Luke also sings on the danceably upbeat "Face the Night," which is so hooky that it just about demands indie-pop radio play. Tennyson are no longer a teenage band, and they sound ready to settle in for the long haul. —**NOAH BERLATSKY** 

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TUE 4/9 **THE COATHANGERS**
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WED 4/10 **BLUE DREAM**
MOTHER TONGUES • CARINAE • UMA BLOO

SAT 4/6 12PM-FREE **KEMBA**
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GOSSIP WOLF

A furry ear to the ground of the local music scene

GOSSIP WOLF has long enjoyed the illuminating writing of *Reader* contributor, festival programmer, gallery owner, and record producer **John Corbett**. Every bookshelf should have copies of *A Listener's Guide to Free Improvisation* and his crackerjack essay collections *Micro-groove* and *Extended Play*. Last month, the University of Chicago Press published **Pick Up the Pieces: Excursions in Seventies Music**, in whose 78 chapters Corbett takes a characteristically kaleidoscopic view of the polyester-and-punk decade. On Saturday, April 6, **Constellation** hosts a book-release party with free barbecue for early arrivals and sets from jazz group **Marker** (featuring Ken Vandermark and Ohmme's Macie Stewart) and a quartet of Eleventh Dream Day bandmates **Rick Rizzo**, **Janet Bean**, and **Doug McCombs** with longtime Gossip Wolf fave **Azita**. Maybe they'll team up for a far-out version of "Heart of Glass"—a wolf can dream!

Chicago trio **Poplife** are the city's finest purveyors of what front man **Ben McFadden** calls "Bruce jazz" (as far as Gossip Wolf can tell, it's an effervescent mix of yacht rock, boogie, smooth jazz, and adult contemporary). Since January, McFadden and his bandmates—bassist **Adam Luksetich** and drummer **Ed Bornstein**, aka postpunk duo Foul Tip—have been celebrating Bruce jazz and adjacent genres at **Pop Nice**, an event held the first Saturday of every month at **Cafe Mustache**. The series will continue, but on Saturday, April 6, Poplife play their last Pop Nice—and their last show for at least a year, since Bornstein's family is growing and he's pausing his extracurriculars.

You might know **Spencer Tweedy** as the drummer for indie rockers the **Blisters** and the duo **Tweedy** (aka Spencer and his dad, Wilco front man Jeff Tweedy). Spencer is also an ace front man in his own right, and last week he released the solo EP **Sleep Is My God**; this wolf especially digs the tender, contemplative "Gold Tooth Kid." —**J.R. NELSON AND LEOR GALIL**

Got a tip? Tweet @Gossip.Wolf or e-mail gossipwolf@chicagoreader.com.

CHICAGO SHOWS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT IN THE WEEKS TO COME

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NEW

Academy of Mexican Dance and Music Cinco de Mayo Fiesta 5/5, 2 PM, Thalia Hall

... And You Will Know Us by the Trail of Dead, **Protomartyr** 5/16, 7:30 PM, Logan Square Auditorium, 18+ **Tim Atlas** 5/5, 8 PM, Schubas, 18+ **Babe Rainbow, Earth Is an Egg** 6/14, 9 PM, Empty Bottle, on sale Fri 4/5, 10 AM **Tony Bennett** 6/21, 8:30 PM, Ravinia Festival, Highland Park, on sale Tue 5/7

Los Campesinos! 7/7, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle, on sale Thu 4/4, 10 AM

Toranzo Cannon 6/29, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston

Charly Bliss 6/15, 9 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+

Chasms, Devon Church 5/24, 9 PM, Empty Bottle

Clan of Xymox, Bellwether Syndicate 11/14, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+

Mikal Cronin 6/1, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle, on sale Fri 4/5, 10 AM

Crumb 5/2, 7:30 PM, Thalia Hall

Melissa Etheridge, George Thorogood and the Destroyers 6/23, 7 PM, Ravinia Festival, Highland Park, on sale Tue 5/7

Etown Get Down 7/3, 9 PM, SPACE, Evanston

Gogol Bordello 6/1, 7:30 PM, Riviera Theatre, 18+

Josh Groban 6/7, 8 PM, Ravinia Festival, Highland Park, on sale Tue 5/7

Glen Hansard 9/6, 8 PM, Chicago Theatre, on sale Fri 4/5

Indian, Immortal Bird, Bloodiest 5/18, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle, on sale Wed 4/3, 10 AM

Indigenous featuring Mato Nanji 8/14, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston

Oliver Kennan 5/21, 7:30 PM, Schubas

Gladys Knight 8/10, 8 PM, Chicago Theatre, on sale Fri 4/5

Ramsey Lewis & Urban Knights, Philip Bailey 5/31, 7 PM, Ravinia Festival, Highland Park, on sale Tue 5/7

Life on Mars tribute to David Bowie 6/21, 7:30 PM, Park West, 18+

Machine Gun Kelly 6/11, 7 PM, Aragon Ballroom, on sale Fri 4/5

Makaya McCraven, Reservoir 4/25, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle

Bobby McFerrin and the Spirituall Band 6/9, 5 PM, Ravinia Festival, Highland Park, on sale Tue 5/7

Joanna Newsom 10/7-9, 9 PM, Thalia Hall, on sale Fri 4/5, 10 AM, 17+

Nickelodeon Slimefest featuring Pitbull, Bebe Rexha, JoJo Siwa, T-Pain 6/8-9, 10 AM, Huntington Bank Pavilion

Pigface 11/30, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, on sale Fri 4/5, 10 AM, 18+

John Prine 6/8, 7:30 PM, Ravinia Festival, Highland Park, on sale Tue 5/7

Kory Quinn & Rainheart 7/2, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston

Rad Trads 5/23, 9 PM, Schubas, 18+

Corinne Bailey Rae 7/28, 7 PM, Thalia Hall, on sale Fri 4/5, 10 AM

Lionel Richie 6/11-12, 7:30 PM, Ravinia Festival, Highland Park, on sale Tue 5/7

Rich Robbins, Kahiem Rivera, Dearly Somber 4/24, 9 PM, Empty Bottle

Sego, Nectar 5/18, 10 PM, Schubas, 18+

Shortly, Small Talks, Elton John Cena 5/24, 7 PM,

Schubas, 18+

Rick Springfield, Richard Marx 6/15, 7 PM, Ravinia Festival, Highland Park, on sale Tue 5/7

Squeeze 8/31, 7:30 PM, Chicago Theatre

Tash Sultana, Pierce Brothers 6/1, 7 PM, Ravinia Festival, Highland Park, on sale Thu 4/4

Sway Wild, Radio Free Honduras 8/3, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston

Rob Thomas, Abby Anderson 6/6, 7:30 PM, Ravinia Festival, Highland Park, on sale Tue 5/7

Town Criers, Edwards, In the Pines, Dreamboats 4/27, 9 PM, Schubas, 18+

UPDATED

Neko Case, Shannon Shaw 4/26-27, 7:30 PM, The Vic, 4/27 sold out, 18+

Jenny Lewis 6/8, 7:30 PM, Riviera Theatre, rescheduled from 3/30 date; previously purchased tickets will be honored, 18+

UPCOMING

Accidentals 6/20, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston

Cisco Adler 4/30, 7 PM, Schubas

Big Bad Voodoo Daddy 5/25, 8 PM, City Winery

Big Thief, Palehound 10/18, 9 PM, Metro, 18+

Black Coffee 5/11, 9 PM, Concord Music Hall, 18+

Black Keys, Modest Mouse 9/27, 7 PM, United Center

Black Label Society 4/30-5/1, 6:30 PM, Concord Music Hall, 17+

Claude, Ziemba, Simulation 5/7, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle

Claypool Lennon Delirium 4/26, 9 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+ **Jon Cleary** 7/18, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston **Anna Clendening** 4/17, 7 PM, Schubas **Dave Davies** 4/21, 8 PM, City Winery **Dawn Ray'd, Lifes** 6/5, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle **Dead & Company** 6/14-15, 7 PM, Wrigley Field **Deer Tick** 5/7, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+ **Karl Denson's Tiny Universe** 6/22, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+ **Drums, Tanukichan** 5/1, 8:30 PM, Metro, 18+

Grelley Duvall Show with John Cicora Tuesdays through 4/23, 9:30 PM, Hideout

Earth, Helms Alee 6/23, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle

Earth, Wind & Fire 7/27-28, 8 PM, Chicago Theatre

Echos 4/19, 8 PM, Chop Shop, 18+

Eels 4/25, 8 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+

Billie Eilish 6/9, 6:30 PM, Aragon Ballroom

Kevin Griffin 5/9, 8 PM, SPACE, Evanston

Jared & the Mill 4/12, 9 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+

Jawbox 7/27-28, 7:30 PM, Metro, 7/27 sold out

Mason Jennings 5/31, 8 PM, City Winery

Lissie 5/10, 7 PM, SPACE, Evanston

Lithics 6/22, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle

Little Church, Jordanna, Malci 6/2, 8 PM, Schubas, 18+

Little People, Marley Carroll, Anchorsong 4/26, 9 PM, Chop Shop, 18+

Local Natives 5/23-24, 8 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+

Nils Lofgren Band 5/12-13, 8 PM, City Winery

Loma Prieta 8/1, 9 PM, Beat Kitchen, 17+

Jeremy Loops 4/16, 8 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+

Lord Huron, Bully 7/26, 8 PM, Chicago Theatre

Lorna Shore, Enterprise Earth 4/30, 6 PM, Reggie's Rock Club, 17+

Lost Frequencies 10/12, 8 PM, Concord Music Hall, 18+

Bruno Major 5/4, 8 PM, Lincoln Hall

Matterhorn, Wing Walker 4/26, 8:30 PM, Constellation, 18+

Duff McKagan, Shooter Jennings 6/6, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+

James McMurtry Band 6/7, 7 PM, SPACE, Evanston

Jonathan McReynolds 4/15, 7 PM, Lincoln Hall

Meat Puppets 6/1, 9 PM, Subterranean

Movements, Boston Manor 5/19, 7 PM, Metro

Mudhoney 5/26, 8 PM, Lincoln Hall

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Scott Mulvahill 8/23, 7 PM, SPACE, Evanston

Mungion 6/14, 11 PM, Lincoln Hall, 18+

Murder Junkies 5/26, 8 PM, Reggie's Music Joint

Nick Murphy 5/29, 9 PM, Metro, 18+

Muse, Walk the Moon 4/12, 8 PM, United Center

National, Alvays 6/28, 7:30 PM, Huntington Bank Pavilion

National Parks 4/13, 6 and 9 PM, Schubas, 18+

Perpetual Groove 4/27, 10 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+

Perturbator 5/9, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+

Lawrence Peters Outfit, Jeremy Pinnell, David Quinn 4/27, 9 PM, Hideout

San Holo, Taska Black, Medasin, Eastghost 4/27, 9 PM, Aragon Ballroom, 18+

SoDown, Cofresi, Homeade Spaceship 4/20, 10 PM, Chop Shop, 18+

Vera Sola 5/19, 8:30 PM, Empty Bottle

Soledad 5/22, 8 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music

Son Volt 4/27, 8:30 PM, Thalia Hall, 17+

Terror Jr 4/24, 6 PM, Chop Shop

Third Eye Blind, Jimmy Eat World 6/27, 7 PM, Huntington Bank Pavilion

Waldos Forever Fest with Big Freedia, Tatiana Hazel 4/20, 9 AM, Dispensary 33, 18+ FREE

Dale Watson, Kelly Willis 5/11, 5 and 8 PM, Maurer Hall, Old Town School of Folk Music

The Who 5/21, 7:30 PM, Hollywood Casino Amphitheatre, Tinley Park

Why Don't We, Brynn Elliot & Eben 4/12, 7 PM, Rosemont Theatre, Rosemont

Wild Belle 4/21, 9 PM, Metro, 18+

Suzi Wu 6/5, 7:30 PM, Schubas

Wu-Tang Clan, Reignwolf 6/1, 7 PM, Aragon Ballroom, 17+

Xeno & Oaklander, Odonis Odonis 4/11, 9 PM, Empty Bottle

Xiu Xiu 5/17, 9 PM, Empty Bottle

Yheti 5/3, 10 PM, Bottom Lounge, 17+

Yo La Tengo, Minus 5/6/23, 7 PM, Temperance Beer Company, Evanston, 18+

Ted Yoder 5/21, 7:30 PM, SPACE, Evanston



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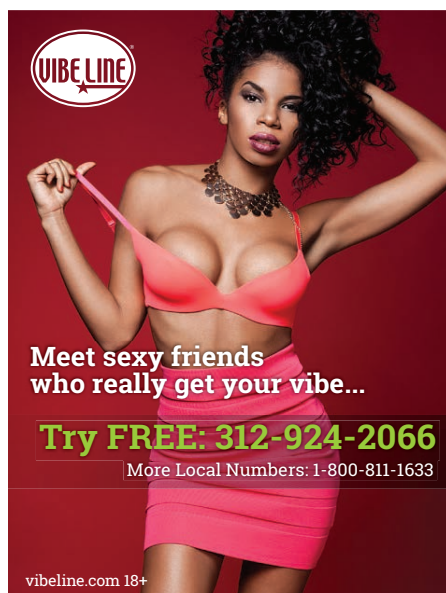
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SAVAGE LOVE

'Never use genital questions as an icebreaker'

Advice on dating (and respecting) trans women as individuals

Q: I'm an adult man, and I have developed a trans attraction after following a particular Tumblr blog. That blog is now gone, sadly, since all adult content has been purged from Tumblr. It wasn't just porn; it consisted of all the things I really enjoy—images of oil paintings and antique furniture, scenic landscapes, wild animals, and then pictures/gifs of trans women. Some women appeared to have had top surgery while others didn't. But all of the women featured on this blog had penises. I had never considered a relationship with a trans woman before, but after browsing the blog for a year, I can honestly say I'd do it in a heartbeat. I would actually like to date a non-op trans woman. I know that many trans women don't like having their male parts touched or acknowledged, but I didn't know that a trans woman can only have a functioning penis if she isn't taking female hormones, and I hadn't considered the effect that might have on somebody's gender dysphoria. How can I meet a trans woman who is hopefully comfortable with her male parts and seeking a relationship? I live in a conservative Bible Belt state—Utah—and I am woefully uneducated on this subject.

—GIRL'S HEART, MAN'S PARTS

A: "My penis and balls aren't 'man's parts,'" said Bailey Jay, the three-time AVN Award-winning transsexual porn star. "They're mine. I own them. Not some random man."

In fairness, GHMP, you acknowledge being woefully uneducated on trans issues, something your letter demonstrated again and again. But let's start here: A trans woman doesn't have boy parts. She has girl parts—unique girl parts, as girl parts go, but girl parts just the same.

"I'm on hormones and my cock works great," said Jay. "Every trans woman is going to be different and have different experiences, and that's the best first bit of advice I can give GHMP. We can smell it a mile away when we are all being lumped in together as a con-

By Dan Savage

cept. Treat any trans woman you’re romantically interested in as an individual.”

As for places to find trans individuals who might be up for dating cis men, well, you might want to sit down, GHMP, as this is pretty shocking.

“I’ve heard OkCupid is inclusive, and I have friends on there whose profiles even help people navigate discussing their bodies in a respectful way,” said Jay. “And finding a trans woman to date who hasn’t undergone bottom surgery is pretty easy. The surgery is expensive and even scary to some. It’s not terribly common that a trans woman has had that particular surgery.”

But just because a trans woman hasn’t had bottom surgery doesn’t mean she doesn’t want bottom surgery, so you shouldn’t assume a trans woman with a penis plans to always keep her penis.

“The real question is what her relationship is with her current genitals,” said Jay. “Maybe she’s very dysphoric about them. Maybe she doesn’t even want you to see them or touch them. Even if her body is your preference, there’s a chance it isn’t hers. I personally love my penis and even like talking about it. But bringing up genitals right away can make you seem insensitive or like you’re dehumanizing your date.”

Jay recommends looking for trans women on mainstream dating apps and then following their lead.

“Now, genitals and curt sexual dialogue are kind of my jam,” said Jay, “so I wouldn’t even flinch or blush. But this can be a very charged subject for people.”

Look to the profiles of trans women you’re interested in for cues about their approach to personal subjects. One woman might put it all out there and welcome questions about her experiences as a trans woman; another woman might be open about being trans but prefer not to focus on it.

“Still, never use genital questions as an icebreaker,” said Jay. “You’ll know when your evening with someone is going well enough that there’s a certain amount of trust,” and at that point, you may be able to bring it up.

“And please make sure to talk about both of your bodies,” added Jay. “This isn’t all about if her body is right for you. Make sure your body meets her standards and preferences, too. I always joke that cis men should have to disclose as well. Any expectation you find yourself putting on her, split the responsibility.”

You can find Bailey Jay at her for-adults-only website TS-BaileyJay.com. 

Send letters to mail@savagelove.net. Download the Savage Lovecast every Tuesday at thestranger.com.  @fakedansavage

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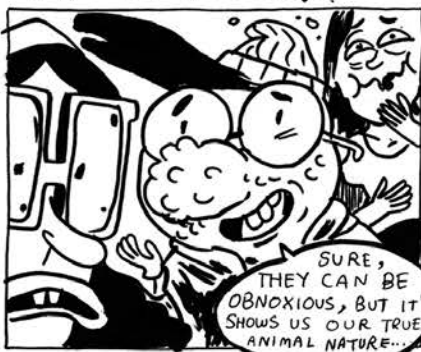
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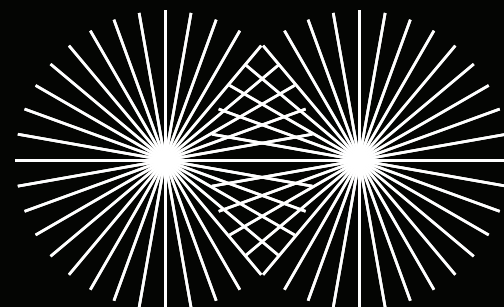
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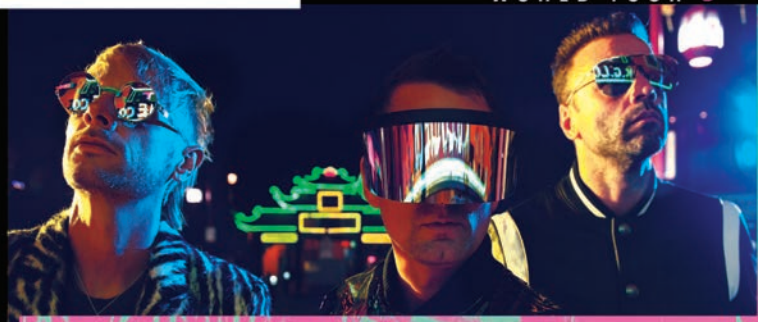
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